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WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

FAST and Furious: A New Frontier for Programmers

In the new chapter of the streaming era, the focus has been on introducing ad-supported tiers to SVODs to provide customers with a lower-cost option. But the hottest acronym in the TV realm has a price that's hard to beat.

FAST channels have seen a recent rise in popularity among programmers and distributors for their ability to unlock new groups of viewers not wanting to add another paid subscription to their monthly bill. They provide a way for programmers to give a glimpse into what they offer, but for those with both FAST offerings and linear networks, the equation becomes how to maintain their linear value with distributors while putting enough enticing content on its FAST channels.

Earlier this month at the Needham Growth Conference, **FuboTV** CEO *David Gandler* talked about the vMVPD's strategy when it comes to [grouping those FAST channels](#). "What I'm doing now is putting all of these FAST channels into this bundle so that I can better negotiate rates," he said, describing how if the vMVPD were to lose **Food Network** it would have hopefully taught consumers to turn to a FAST channel like **Tasty**. Gandler predicted FAST channels might eventually even garner affiliate fees if they can show their worth.

Fubo's tactic signals the potential for FAST content to usurp a spot in a distributor's lineup from a similar-themed linear offering. Despite the industry experiencing rapid changes in viewership habits, programmers like **AMC Networks** don't

find that there's an issue when it comes to FAST channels and negotiating fees for linear networks. Like many others, they take the view that having content on multiple platforms helps build up the value by exposing it to distinct viewers in different places and through different distribution windows. Older seasons of shows in FAST environments can promote sampling and draw viewers back to linear or direct-to-consumer offerings like **AMC+**.

"[FAST channels] expose our content to new audiences that aren't within the linear ecosystem," said *Evan Adlman*, SVP, Advanced Advertising & Digital Partnerships for AMC Networks. "We find that it creates a whole ecosystem for AMC Networks to be able to deliver content, similar content and recent-season content into these platforms to get in front of new audiences that are not watching our shows on traditional linear cable."

Ovation TV is another programmer that sees the benefits of having its content available on as many platforms as possible. It has linear carriage through **Comcast**, **DirectTV**, **Charter** and **Verizon Fios**, while also offering up TV everywhere app **Ovation Now** and FAST channels **Journey** and **Mystery Alley**.

When Ovation was in its initial stages of expanding its audience on AVOD and FAST platforms, EVP, Programming and Production *Scott Woodward* said it was tricky to avoid duplicating content across the three platforms. So far, there hasn't been a great deal of that, allowing for all three to serve as a discovery point for Ovation's content.

Mark Your Calendars!

Cablefax 2023 Award Submission Deadlines

The FAXIES Awards

Deadline: March 24
Final Deadline: March 31

Top Ops Nominations

Deadline: April 21

The Diversity List Nominations

Deadline: May 12
Final Deadline: May 19

Most Powerful Women Nominations

Deadline: August 11
Final Deadline: August 18

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“The more the content is seen, the more valuable it becomes,” Woodward said. “There’s a very old adage that in terms of the distribution side, that you’d hold back content, you would only allow it a certain number of runs on the channel, you try to keep it to that one channel. I think that there is a great deal of synergy in having it up on multiple channels just because of discovery.”

Elsewhere, INSP entered the FAST fray in May 2022 when it rolled out Cowboy Way. COO Dale Ardizzone said the network views the **Cowboy Way** as a complement to the linear INSP, and that it gives them the ability to focus on original programming and movies for the FAST channel while keeping the traditional classics on linear. But just because INSP has the foundation to maintain both platforms doesn’t mean other networks will experience the same flexibility.

“I think there are some networks that need to be very careful and very strategic about how they use FAST tools,” Ardizzone said. “We’re not concerned about it in any way torpedoing the linear [value], but [for] others who don’t necessarily have the same sort of structure and foundation we do? I think it probably takes a lot more strategic planning.”

So far, Ardizzone said Cowboy Way has received “a lot of positive feedback” from its partners and viewers, which primarily leans toward the younger demographics because of its digital nature. It’s something that the network wanted to utilize once it saw FAST channels find new audiences, which is where it can point to the available content on INSP. It expanded on that Monday when vMVPD **Frdly TV** added Cowboy Way to its lineup.

“For us, we have found a great sort of duopoly where we can have an audience primarily focused on our originals on FAST, and we have a linear audience that overwhelmingly prefers our classic westerns ... the difference with FAST is we really focus on all of the programs once they’ve had that premiere on linear.”

NEWSMAX WANTS \$1/SUB FROM DIRECTV

DirecTV is still open to bringing **Newsmax** back to its lineup, but only if the network lessens its financial demands. That’s according to statements made by DirecTV over the weekend on its TV Promise page where it said its differences with Newsmax are not political or ideological. “Newsmax made unreasonable demands that would force DirecTV customers to fund the network’s shift from a free nationwide streaming service to one that will require a pay TV subscription. Since we would not agree to Newsmax’s demand to pay them tens of millions of dollars in licensing fees, DirecTV was no longer permitted by Newsmax to air its content,” the video provider said. Newsmax is fighting back against the claims that its financial asks were out of line, saying in a statement that DirecTV is incorrect when it prices the proposed deal in the tens of millions of dollars. “Newsmax is seeking a very modest fee of about \$1 per subscriber per year when we believe our market rate is \$5, and it’s a key reason why hundreds of cable operators renewed with us last year,” the network said. “A deal with Newsmax would be a fraction of that amount.” Republican lawmakers are continuing to show interest in the carriage drop, and Rep. **Matt Rosendale** (R-MT) was the latest to

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slam DirecTV when he appeared on Newsmax's "Wake Up America" on Monday. "This is another technique that Big Tech, big corporations are using to silence the opposition party. They don't want to have free speech taking place," he said.

MLB READYING FOR BALLY SPORTS BANKRUPTCY

The **MLB** is preparing contingency plans for the teams that could be impacted if **Bally Sports** parent **Diamond Sports** is forced to file for bankruptcy. In a *Front Office Sports* report, MLB CRO *Noah Garden* said that while the league would prefer if RSNs can meet all the terms they agreed to when signing media rights, it is prepared to step in if circumstances change. MLB has been critical of Bally Sports+ since **Sinclair** announced its direct-to-consumer RSN plans, and **Fox Sports Media** alumnus *Billy Chambers* started work as the league's first EVP, Media and Business Development last week. One of his focuses? Determining the best way to distribute games in each market.

T-MOBILE DOWN AS WIRELESS SLOWDOWN LOOMS

SVB MoffettNathanson is downgrading **T-Mobile** to a "Market Perform" rating, but not because the mobile operator hasn't been able to live up to its recent promises. Instead, it is in response to subscriber growth slowdowns and the continued impact Cable has been able to make in the wireless industry. "But for the shares to outperform the market from here, we believe they will have to not just make, but beat and raise, their subscriber guidance. In a slower growth wireless industry, that will be a heavier lift," the firm said. "Cable's accelerating share gains will make that even harder. So, yes, T-Mobile is still the best house on a bad block (by far). But it is a house that is now roughly fairly valued, in our view." SVB MoffettNathanson's target price for the wireless operator's stock is unchanged at \$174.

CARRIAGE

Three of **Sinclair's** free OTA multicast networks are adding 2.4 million TV households by the end of 2Q23 thanks to new local affiliate agreements with **Nexstar**, **Gray** and **Entertainment**. The crime drama and action network **CHARGE!** will add **KRON** (San Francisco/Oakland/San Jose), **WWAX** (Hartford/New Haven, Connecticut), **WVLT** (Knoxville), **KVSN** (Colorado Springs) and **KEUS** (San Angelo, Texas). **Comet**, the sci-fi and fantasy network, added **KGHB** (Colorado Springs) to its distribution. Lastly, **TBD** will launch in **KPHO** (Phoenix), **KBNT** (San Diego) and **KZBO** (Lubbock/Midland/Odessa, Texas). Those additions will bring total new coverage since the start of 2022 to almost 17 million TV households, not including Sinclair's existing footprint. – **Fuse Media** FAST channels "OUTtv Proud" and "Shades of Black" are now available on **Pluto TV Canada**. The first is designed to superserve LGBTQ+ audiences while the second is a collection of films, series and specials meant to authentically represent Black culture.

RATINGS

Both of **ESPN's** morning programs "Get Up" and "First Take"

enjoyed their most-watched month of January ever. Get Up averaged 445,000 viewers for the month, up 2% YOY, while First Take had an average of 561,000—a 12% YOY bump. Mondays were the most-watched days of the week on average for both shows, with Get Up at 544,000 average viewers and First Take at 685,000.

PROGRAMMING

The fifth episode of **HBO's** "The Last of Us" will have an early premiere on **HBO Max** and HBO On Demand starting Friday at 9pm. The linear debut will follow Sunday at 9pm. – Super Bowl Sunday will be accompanied by programming from the **American Kennel Club** for a second straight year on **ESPN**. The AKC Agility Dog Invitational will run on **ESPN2** from 6-8pm before the AKC National Championship Highlight Show airs at 8pm on ESPN. The AKC Agility Championship Highlight Show will round out coverage at 9pm, also on the flagship network. – The first annual "To The Rescue Pup-A-Thon 2023" will air on **Great American Family** on Sunday from 12pm-4. The network and the animal series "To The Rescue" are joining forces for the event to raise money for animal rescue organizations via the Forever Family Rescue Foundation. The donation window is already open as viewers can text LIVE to 801801 or visit pupathon.tv. – **MTV** is airing documentary "Don't Leave Me Behind: Stories of Young Ukrainian Survival" in recognition of the first anniversary since Russia's invasion of Ukraine. It will premiere commercial-free on the network on Feb. 21 at 10pm. – **Paramount+** debuted its first-ever Valentine's Day-inspired collection Monday, showing off more than 10 themed carousels with TV episodes and movies from across a variety of genres. For example, "Classic Romance" features hits like "Grease" and "Dirty Dancing" while "Offbeat Relationships" showcases quirky stories like "Edward Scissorhands." – **Showtime** is developing projects that are offshoots of hit series "Billions" including installments centered in Miami and London. "Millions (w/t)" will feature a group of Manhattan-based thirty-somethings trying to make it in the world of finance, and "Trillions (w/t)" is a drama based on fictional stories of the richest people in the world. The world of "Dexter" is also expanding with Showtime greenlighting "Dexter: Origins (w/t)" to series. It is also developing a new version of "Dexter: New Blood" and is exploring projects based on other characters from the show's universe. Additionally, Showtime ordered "The Department," an espionage political thriller series based on the French drama "Le Bureau des Legendes."

PEOPLE

TelevisaUnivision hired *Jennifer Rogers* as EVP, Consumer and Corporate Marketing of U.S. Networks. Reporting to President of U.S. Networks *Ignacio Meyer*, she'll manage the development, creation, production and execution of all corporate and consumer campaigns of the company's TV networks in the U.S. Rogers will also work on innovative, data-driven inventory management and increased collaboration with TU's partners in Mexico.