

Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Free Way: Sling Group President Explains Freestream Offering

Eight years after DISH first introduced Sling TV, the virtual MVPD is adding a free option. Sling Freestream made its debut Thursday with more than 200 FAST channels and thousands of on demand titles, with more to come. In this excerpted interview, we discuss the strategy with Sling TV Group President Gary Schanman.

Why launch this free service?

This is an extension of our DNA, which is giving customers TV on their own terms. We've done that from the start. We got rid of contracts, and we still have the best value pay TV service in the market. We saw customers migrating to free in general throughout the industry. We realized that for us to really appeal to customers, this was a natural next step. Our goal there is to increase the universe of people that consider Sling and really be able to cater to all of their different needs at different times. We have a platform that has really great free content. And we have a seamless way for people to upsell and whether they buy some of our DTC services like **AMC+**, **discovery+**, **NBA+**, etc, or whether they actually want to maybe get a couple of months of college football, they can engage in this environment, and this platform in a way that's different than our competitors.

Are there concerns about cannibalizing the pay side of Sling?

We are all in on the paid side of the business. We're making tons of feature enhancements, experience enhancements,

etc, across the board. I think that this will be accretive to our overall business. I'm not worried about cannibalization because I think that what we offer on the pay side is so clearly valuable. I think them coexisting will work out really well. I also think it's about establishing a new relationship with the consumer. I like to feel that we're very pro-consumer. There's a ton of content everywhere, but you have to go to a million places. Having more things in one place where we can take care of more of their streaming needs, we think works.

You're starting with more than 200 FAST channels. There are so many out there. How did you decide what to feature and what you'll add?

We have plans to launch over 400 channels, along with thousands more on demand titles over the next few months. We wanted a mix of well-known brands, but we also wanted to find some unique niche areas that we could we could put out there and learn from. One area in particular that's in our DNA that we're excited to explore is foreign language programming. We believe it's very underserved in the U.S. market. We're also talking to our partners that we work with all the time in our normal business, as well as some other niche providers. It's not just about quantity, it is about quality. We don't want to make it even harder to find things because we throw in channels that aren't relevant. To help navigate, we're going to be improving our universal search capability, our channel surfing capability, our guide, filtering and all that.

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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Questions: Kate Schaeffer at kschaeffer@accessintel.com

And then there's advantages for Sling because you have an ad load on the FAST channels?

That's another thing to highlight. The same way consumers have to go to six, seven different places to get the streaming they want, on the ad side, it's just as true where advertisers are now trying to find FAST customers. Now we have a place where they can go where they can get a broader swath of the streaming populations. There are multiple populations out there from us on our own proprietary ad tech stack and they can do a lot of great targeting.

FuboTV's CEO recently talked about putting FAST channels next to linear nets to train customers to watch alternatives that could help with linear rate negotiations. What's your take on that?

We have great relationships with those programmers that have gone on for decades. We love what they offer in general, but we are very open to bringing in deeper libraries of content in specific genres. We're proud to have all that live within our guides. I can't really comment on what Fubo is working on, but for us, we look at it as accretive. We think that there are a number of genres out there that are being super served now that maybe weren't. And we're excited to have them on board.

Do you think we could ever get to the point where you're paying a fee for these FAST channels?

I don't think that's something that we need to contemplate either way in this space. I think in general, we, as a company, spend money on content that's valuable to our consumers. And we are very protective over our consumers in general. We're always weighing the value of that content and how we approach that from a fiscal perspective.

SUPER BOWL SUNDAY

It's almost time for the kickoff of Super Bowl LVII between the Chiefs and Eagles. **Fox** will have broadcast duties for the big game, which begins at 6:30pm from Glendale, Arizona. *Kevin Burkhardt* and *Greg Olsen* will handle the commentary for the first time since *Joe Buck* and *Troy Aikman* departed for **ESPN**. Fox will also have the broadcast available on the Fox Sports website and app without the need for authentication, a relief for **DirectTV** and **DISH** customers in markets that lost their respective Fox affiliate because of carriage disputes. Speaking of the Fox Sports app, the company announced Friday that the app is now available on **LG** Smart TV devices through the LG webOS Smart TV platform. Viewers can get live and on-demand access to Fox, **FS1**, **FS2** and **Fox Deportes**.

SPACEX QUESTIONED ON USE OF STARLINK IN WAR

SpaceX's Starlink was largely applauded when it began offering aid to Ukraine in the form of terminals for internet service in February 2022, shortly after the Russian invasion. Now, it has some questions about how that service should be allowed to be used. The Washington Post [reports](#) that SpaceX COO *Gwynne Shotwell* responded to rumors that the Ukrainian military is operating weaponized drones using broadband service powered by Starlink, saying it was never the company's intent to have its internet support military activity. *Elon Musk* also tweeted last month saying SpaceX is not allowing Starlink to be used for long-range drone strikes. Ukrainian Interior Ministry advisor Anton Gerashchenko responded on **Twitter** Thursday, saying he is certain Starlink saved hundreds of thousands of lives and that Ukraine only liberates and protects its own. "No neutrality in fight of good and evil," he said. But Shotwell and Musk are facing even more questions about those

Every year, we ask the Cablefax 100 a variety of questions, from what's their go-to Starbucks order to their predictions for the metaverse to how many companies they've worked for over the course of their careers.

What should we ask the Cablefax 100?

Submit your suggestions to: 100questions@cablefax.com



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stances when Starlink has positioned itself as a solution for government customers, including military branches. The **U.S. Air Force** awarded SpaceX a \$1.9 million one-year contract to evaluate Starlink in Europe and Asia last August. The deal included Starlink terminals and internet services to support units based at the Ramstein Air Base in Germany.

GOOGLE FIBER GROWS

Google Fiber is expanding to two new cities: Westminster, Colorado, and Chandler, Arizona. It entered into an agreement with the City of Westminster to provide internet to residents and businesses and work is being done now on engineering. The Chandler City Council approved a license agreement with Google Fiber late Thursday, allowing it to build a FTTH network. Construction in both areas will begin later this year with the first customers to be served early next year.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Comcast is celebrating Black History Month with two docs that highlight under-represented entrepreneurs. The first one is the second iteration of the three-part docuseries “Founding in Color,” which follows the journeys of 11 Black and Latino entrepreneurs as they face challenges with their businesses. That’ll be available on **Peacock** and Black Experience on Xfinity starting Thursday. “The Road to RISE,” chronicling the difficulties four small business owners faced while dealing with COVID-19, premieres Thursday on the Comcast RISE section on X1. – **History Channel** will debut one-hour documentary “Can’t Turn Us Around: Alabama’s Foot Soldiers” on Feb. 22 at 7pm. It follows a movement created by Black Americans called “foot soldiers” that sought to rid racial segregation and guarantee equal civil rights in America. – **ESPN** is celebrating Black History Month with programming across its nets and **ESPN+**. The streamer’s Black History Always Collection has originals such as “Breakaway,” a story about *Maya Moore* advocating for a man she believed was wrongly imprisoned. On Feb. 26, “SportsCenter” will air “Lady Wolves,” about the 1982 Cheyney State Lady Wolves basketball team that remains the only HBCU basketball program—men’s or women’s—to compete in the NCAA Division-I Final Four.

CABLEFAX DASHBOARD

Twitter Hits

Robert M. McDowell @McDowell1Tweet
Happy 27th birthday to the Telecommunications Act of 1996. A lot of things have changed since then. So maybe, just maybe, it's time for an update?



Shirley Bloomfield @sbloomfield15
Early preview opportunity for #RTIME2024 while here in lovely Tampa for @BICSI meeting to share my thoughts on #broadband #infrastructure opportunities. Not minding the weather a bit either! @NTCAconnect members will love this location..in February!



NTIA @NTIAgov
This week we have every Federal Program Officer from across the country gathered at @CommerceGov for our Broadband Academy
Our team is ready to work together to make sure all of America gets connected to affordable, reliable, high-speed internet service #InternetForAll



Research

(Source: S&P Global Marketplace)

- > Over the past 56 years, the median combined final score of each Super Bowl game has been 46 points.
- > When the favored team wins, the market responds with an average return of 12.9% versus 9.9% when the underdog pulls out the win.
- > When games are played west of the Mississippi River, the average market return in the subsequent years is 7.8% versus the 14.3% seen when games are played east of the divide.

Up Ahead

- FEBRUARY 28-MARCH 3:** [ACA Connects Summit](#); DC
- MARCH 13-16:** [Satellite 2023](#); DC
- MARCH 28:** [Free State Foundation's Fifteenth Annual Policy Conference](#); DC
- APRIL 19-20:** [Telecommunications Industry Association's BEAD Success Summit](#); Arlington

Quotable

“I think the model [on sports rights] ultimately will change and will become an over-the-top model. I said yesterday I don’t know when that will be. We’ve had conversations about it. I actually think a... streaming model would be a phenomenal product for the sports fan and give them more flexibility. Pricing is obviously something we have to look at very carefully and a combination of pricing and how many subs do you need to make it make sense in terms of the bottom line... if you do the math, there’s an inevitability to it... I’ve talked about general entertainment being undifferentiated. Hulu is a very successful platform and a good consumer proposition, but everything is on the table right now. I’m not going to speculate whether we’re a buyer or a seller of it, but I obviously have suggested that I’m concerned about undifferentiated general entertainment, particularly in the competitive landscape that we’re operating in, and we’re going to look at it very objectively.”
– **Disney CEO Bob Iger** talking about ESPN eventually going largely OTT and the possibility of a Hulu sale on **CNBC’s** “Squawk on the Street.”