

# Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

## Welcome 2024: Charter Raising Rates, Quiet New Year's Eve

When Charter struck its landmark [deal](#) with Disney in the fall, the consensus was that the operator won its quest to have DTC services included as part of various video packages and the programmer was successful in securing a carriage fee increase. Charter has now begun announcing its 2024 pricing and video plans are increasing \$5/month in many cases.

The operator's Spectrum TV Select plan will increase by \$5 a month beginning with the Jan. 30 billing cycles. Of course, that's not all because of the Disney deal. Operators across the board have been raising video, citing rising fees charged by TV networks. **Comcast's** average bill is [increasing](#) by about 3% in 2024, while **Altice USA's Optimum** customers will see an average bill increase of just under 2%.

Charter's Spectrum TV Select Signature and Select Plus will each increase by \$5/month. These new plans announced last year feature the full complement of sports programming for Plus, while Select Signature excludes certain sports content, including RSNs. The less popular Spectrum TV Silver and Gold packages will each increase by \$10/month. Customers in promotional packages won't be impacted until they roll off of the promo. The biggest increase will be to grandfathered legacy Time Warner Cable double- and triple-play bundles, which will go up by \$20 a month. The price for Spectrum receivers and digital terminal adapters is rising by \$1.51/month for each. Operators sometimes vary broadcast TV charges by market, but Charter has a uniform broadcast fee that

will increase \$2.55/month across all its markets.

"We have taken a stand for a new, customer-focused model that provides more value and choice for video entertainment when negotiating all of our programming agreements," a Charter spokesperson said. "Despite these ongoing efforts, programmers continually raise fees for their content, which are passed through as increased fees to viewers and drive higher costs across the entire industry."

Broadband is mostly unaffected. However, Charter's low-cost broadband offering Spectrum Internet Assist is jumping to 50 Mbps down/5 Mbps up, from 30/4. With the new speed comes a new price of \$24.99/month, previously \$19.99. It's also raising the cost of the optional Spectrum Advanced WiFi add-on to \$7 from \$5, the first time the operator has increased the price for the service.

While news of rate increases have been the norm in recent months for traditional MVPDs, vMVPDs and DTC [streamers](#), the holiday tradition of carriage fights at the stroke of midnight on New Year's Eve was bucked this year. There were a few rumblings. **Verizon** had warned subscribers that they could lose **Sinclair** broadcast stations (a deal was completed without any disruption) and there were press reports that Comcast and **Paramount** needed to strike a deal (they did). Given **DISH** and **Nexstar's** three-week blackout in December 2020, there was concern the two might squabble again. But all signs point to a deal being inked without a peep from either party.

**FETV** is no longer offered on Comcast in the Chicago area. Comcast has said that the network was made available through

# Happy Holidays

FROM **Cablefax**

THE THREE PACKAGES OFFERED THIS YEAR INCLUDE:

1. Five awards entries to use for:
  - » The Faxies
  - » The Diversity List
  - » Most Powerful Women
2. Table of 10 at Most Powerful Women Awards Ceremony
3. Three 1-year Cablefax Daily Subscriptions

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a leased access arrangement that FETV didn't renew. The programmer argues that it's not seeking a license fee for carriage and that Comcast customers in other areas could soon lose access to the channel.

While Dec. 31 didn't bring many retrans fireworks, there are still plenty of blackouts that have carried on into the new year. **TEGNA** stations have been dark on **DirecTV** since Nov. 30 and remain that way. The provider has been without **White Knight** and **Mission Broadcasting** stations for more than a year. **DISH** hits the one-year anniversary of its White Knight and Mission blackout tomorrow, and it has been without **Cox Media** stations since November of 2022.

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### NTIA ACHIEVES BEAD MILESTONE, ADJUSTS REGULATORY GUIDANCE

**NTIA** celebrated a major milestone last week with Administrator *Alan Davidson* announcing on **X** that all states had submitted their Initial Proposals for BEAD that lay out how each will spend their share of the \$42 billion made available through the program. Now it is a waiting game to see how the agency receives the myriad proposals and moves the states through its approval process. It also delivered new guidance on the implementation of BEAD and how the funding will be distributed. The changes come after a number of stakeholders and ISPs voiced concerns that the NTIA's initial rules would discourage participation. ISPs will be allowed to upgrade equipment in BEAD-funded projects without first having to obtain NTIA's approval, to use program income from BEAD-funded broadband infrastructure projects without restriction and the Federal Interest period during which ISPs will be forced to comply with program rules has been shorted to 10 years from the previously-established 20 years. "NTIA's guidance adopts exemptions and modifications to the requirements that will encourage participation by **ACA Connects** Members and other broadband providers, leading to more cost-effective deployments," ACA Connects President/CEO *Grant Spellmeyer* said in a statement. "ACA Connects thanks NTIA and looks forward to working with the agency and States to get robust and reliable broadband service to all locations in the U.S."

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### ECHOSTAR, DISH TAKE MERGER TO THE FINISH LINE

**EchoStar** closed out 2023 with a bang, completing its acquisition of **DISH Network** on Dec. 31. The deal included some moving pieces, with a wholly owned subsidiary of EchoStar merging with and into DISH and DISH coming through the merger as a wholly owned subsidiary of EchoStar. Each share of DISH Network Class A and Class C Common Stock converted into

0.351 shares of EchoStar Class A Common Stock, and each DISH Class B Common Stock converted into 0.351 shares of EchoStar Class Common Stock. The combined company continues to be headquartered in Englewood, Colorado.

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### ADS COMING TO PRIME VIDEO LATER THIS MONTH

We have an official date for when **Amazon** is adding advertisements to movies and TV shows to **Prime Video**: January 29. No changes will be made to the \$8.99/month price point. However, customers can pre-register for the ad-free option, which goes for an additional \$2.99/month. Those customers won't be billed until the 29th. Ads won't be included in rented or purchased content. The initial rollout includes the U.S., U.K., Germany and Canada, with France, Italy, Spain, Mexico and Australia joining later this year.

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### SPRING FOOTBALL'S NEW ERA

The question of whether two spring football leagues could survive has an answer. The **USFL** and **XFL** made their merger official Sunday, forming the new **United Football League** (UFL) that'll make its debut in late March. The two leagues revealed an [intention to merge](#) in September with few confirmed details. Now it's known the new league will have eight teams across Arlington, Texas, D.C., San Antonio, St. Louis, Birmingham, Houston, Memphis and Detroit. Broadcast details are yet to be finalized, but an [official promotional graphic](#) shows the logos of **ABC**, **ESPN**, **Fox** and **FS1** under a March 30 date (when the UFL's opener will take place). The league's official release also included quotes from league partners such as Fox Sports CEO/Executive Producer *Eric Shanks* and ESPN Chairman *Jimmy Pitaro*. Notably, there wasn't any mention or quote from **NBC Sports**, which had collaborated with Fox Sports for USFL broadcast rights. ESPN had the exclusive rights to the XFL.

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### FCC STANDS BY BROADCAST OWNERSHIP RULES

The **FCC** headed into the holiday break celebrating with the Commission adopting the 2018 quadrennial review of broadcast ownership rules on Dec. 22. The vote, which fell 3-2 across party lines, came in just five days ahead of the Dec. 27 due date the **D.C. Court of Appeals** gave the agency to pressure it into completing its long-overdue assignment. FCC Chair *Jessica Rosenworcel* and Commissioners *Geoffrey Stark* and *Anna Gomez* gave their approval to a Report and Order that reaffirmed the Dual Network Rule preventing combinations of two of the Top 4 rated broadcast nets in a market. The Local Television Ownership Rule limiting the number of full power television stations an entity may own within

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the same market to two will also remain. “To be clear, at this point only three core rules remain. No entity can own all the television stations in a single market, with a case specific request necessary to own more than one of the top four stations. No entity can own all the radio stations in a single market. There is also a restriction of the national combination of two of the four big television networks—**ABC, CBS, Fox** and **NBC.**” She also highlighted a decision to extend the restrictions to multicast streams and low-power stations, saying it closes a [loophole](#) that can be used to evade Commission rules. **NCTA** celebrated the agency’s decision to act on that front, claiming in a statement that the FCC and the **DOJ** have repeatedly found that common ownership of two top-four stations in a market gives the owner enhanced leverage in retrans consent negotiations, the ability to unreasonably raise prices and increases the risk of large-scale blackouts. “That consumer and competitive harm is the same whether the commonly owned top-rated stations are full-power or low-power, or if an owner controls multiple top-four signals using multicast streams,” NCTA said. “Closing the LPTV/multicast loophole is therefore essential to reining in broadcasters’ unreasonable carriage demands.” The R&O states that the 2018 quadrennial proceeding failed to offer the Commission clear steps it could take with respect to structural ownership rules to address concerns regarding minority and female ownership, but did note that the agency believes the 2022 quadrennial review will provide an opportunity to examine more specific proposals on how it could, or if it should, move forward with changes.

## NOT EVERYTHING’S STREAMING

A lot is made about various sporting events and live news not available on streaming, but in this age of cord cutting it’s worth noting that there is entertainment content that’s sticking to linear as well. **TLC**’s reality series “Sister Wives” has scored some nice viewership this season as the husband’s wives have left him one by one. The show gains audience with its airing on **Warner Bros. Discovery**’s DTC offerings **Max** and **Discovery+**. However, the most recent Sister Wives specials are only available on **TLC** and provider authenticated TV Everywhere app **TLC Go**. The specials are “Talk Backs” and “Look Backs” that have the cast watching and reacting to pivotal show moments and arguably provide some of the juiciest fodder of the reality show’s 18th season. As **TLC** watchers lit up a Reddit forum with posts about the specials, upset cord cutters realized they couldn’t view them and were livid. A network representative confirmed to **CFX** that the specials won’t appear on **Max** or **Discovery+**. There doesn’t seem to be any hard and fast rule here, but Redditors note similar specials for other **TLC** shows such as “Welcome to Plathville” have also skipped the streamers.

## ALTICE USA MOVES THE CHEESE

**Altice USA** announced last week the sale of financial news network **Cheddar News** to **Archetype**, whose holdings include **Army News** and **Defense News**. *The NY Times* [reported](#) Tuesday that some Cheddar workers have been placed on unpaid leave by the new owner.

“We would like to have given you more notice of this action, but the decision was necessitated by unforeseen internal and external factors that required rapid adjustments in our business strategy,” said an email shared with the Times. Altice USA didn’t disclose the sale price for Cheddar, which it acquired in 2019 for \$200 million.

## YOUTUBE TV RIDING ON PELOTON

Just in time for New Year’s resolutions, **YouTube TV** became a Peloton Entertainment Hub partner to provide All-Access members the option to stream the vMVPD from their bike, tread or row machines. Members will need to connect to their existing YouTube TV account or sign up to access programming. It adds to Peloton’s recent additions of live content after having recently partnered with the **NBA** to offer **NBA League Pass** on compatible devices.

## FOOTBALL RATINGS

Another season of Monday Night Football on **ESPN** is in the books, and it officially became the most watched in the ESPN era (since 2006) with an average of 17.1 million viewers across 20 games. It’s a 33% improvement compared to 2022’s viewership. Last Monday’s battle that saw the Cowboys outlast the Lions garnered 25.66 million viewers across **ESPN, ESPN2, ESPN+, NFL+** and **ABC**, which was up 92% from the comparable Week 17 game in 2021. The telecast solidified MNF having three of its most-watched games since 1997 within a six-week span. – **Prime Video** completed its second season as the home of Thursday Night Football, and it scored a 24% increase YOY among total viewers, according to **Nielsen** panel-only ratings. TNF averaged 11.86 million viewers per game throughout the season along with 13 weeks of double-digit YOY ratings improvements. TNF broke the 10-million mark 12 times this season, up from the six times it had in 2022. The median age of fans watching came in at 48.5 years old. P18-34 viewers averaged 2.4 million viewers—up 14% from 2.11 million in 2022—and female viewership spiked 30% with an average of 3.86 million viewers F2+. – The first-ever **Peacock** exclusive **NFL** game between the Bills and Chargers on Dec. 23 reeled in 9.9 million total viewers, according to **Nielsen** custom fast national data with out-of-home viewership included. The stream averaged 7.2 million viewers across **Peacock, NBC** local stations in L.A. and Buffalo and **NFL+** and peaked at an average of 8.3 million viewers from 10:45-11pm. – As for that other football, the Liverpool-Arsenal match on Dec. 23 became the most-watched Premier League match in U.S. history with 1.96 million viewers across **NBC, Peacock** and **NBC Sports** digital platforms. The match was the second most-streamed simulcast of the 2023-24 season with an average minute audience of 464,000 viewers, only behind the 509,000 Liverpool and Manchester United on Dec. 17. Including Spanish-language viewership on **Telemundo**, the total audience delivery came in at 2.28 million viewers.