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WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Fit for a Fight: Altice USA Ready to Compete for Every Available Customer

This is the most competitive environment **Altice USA** CEO *Dennis Mathew* has ever seen, but that doesn't mean his company shouldn't do everything it can to win back customers and return to growth.

"When you look to the east, we've got 70% overbuilt with **Verizon**, a very mature overbuilder. And then when you look at the west, you've got small fiber overbuilders, **AT&T** in a bit of a pocket and then over all of that you've got fixed wireless kind of popping up," he said during an appearance at the Morgan Stanley TMT Conference Monday. "When they have capacity on their network, they get a bit more aggressive and then when they don't, you hear less from them."

Mathew said one of the most important shifts that gives Optimum a chance to compete is its adoption of a regional leadership team. Mathew said Altice USA has brought on more than 100 new VPs and above across sales, marketing, product, finance and more to improve customer service, the quality of the network experience and the customizing of offers that were being put out into the marketplace.

With fewer moves and other opportunities to win customers than maybe ever before, Mathew is more determined than ever to develop playbooks for the Altice USA team to use when those jump balls do come up. "It does look a little different when you're talking about a mature fiber provider like Verizon because they've got the full portfolio of products, and so Optimum Complete is

that much more important," he said. "But we can look a little bit differently in an area where there's a fiber overbuilder, and we shouldn't have the same exact price and product portfolio because there's no mobile there, they have no video there."

Like many, he is waiting for the dust to settle and what ultimately comes to be when it comes to this jv sports streamer. But he's not opposed to its existence.

"We want our linear customers to have access to these types of solutions, and so how do we do that in a way that's a win-win, win for the customer, win for the programmers and a win for us. I don't think we're there yet," he said. "Those conversations are not happening at the right level, and so those are some of the discussions we're pushing to have in the near term."

He said those conversations with its programming partners to try and find long-term solutions are already happening, but he also teased that the operator would be launching its version of skinny bundles later this year. He said they would offer far more packaging and content flexibility than the company offers today, and the bundles were informed through consumer research.

When it comes to the rumors that **Charter** was examining purchasing Altice USA, Mathew had three things to say: "One, we're a controlled company. Two is I don't speculate on what other companies may or may not be doing. And three is that my number one focus is to drive maximum positive impact for our teammates, our customers, the communities that we serve and our shareholders by accelerating this transformation."

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MURDOCH GIVES MORE DETAILS ON STREAMING SPORTS JV

The finer details of **Fox Corp.**, **Warner Bros. Discovery** and **ESPN's** sports streaming jv are still to be unveiled, but Fox Corp. Executive Chair/CEO *Lachlan Murdoch* peeled the curtain back a little bit on what the new product wishes to accomplish. Speaking at **Morgan Stanley's** TMT Conference on Monday, he shed light on where the company stands in regards to inspiration and expectations for the jv. Notably, he revealed that internal expectations are that the service will reach five million subscribers within five years, which impacts how the jv will be priced upon its initial rollout. "Fox, Disney and Warner Brothers Discovery will get paid per subscriber just as we would if we were if we were selling to a vMVPD," Murdoch said. "Because of that, the pricing is going to be in the higher ranges of what people have talked about. The output from all that is that our internal expectations and what we've built our plans around are that within five years, we will have five million subscribers." Folks could look at the Australian OTT service **Kayo Sports** for what served as Murdoch's inspiration. What Murdoch likes about Kayo, which uses programming from Fox Sports, ESPN and others, is that the brands aren't prominently separated—it's all a homepage built for sports fans to access games they want to watch. As for the concern of how the jv will impact cord cutting, Murdoch isn't worried as the three companies are focusing on those outside of the cable bundle. And as for the biggest hurdle of them all—regulatory approval—Murdoch shares the same no-worry sentiment. "When you look at the service, it's pro-consumer, it's pro-competition, it's focused on a cohort of people on a segment that is not just underserved. It's not served at all with sports content," Murdoch said.

FCC SAYS APRIL TO BE LAST FULL MONTH OF ACP SUPPORT

The **FCC** officially notified ACP providers Monday that it can only fully fund the Affordable Connectivity Program fund through the month of April thanks to the lack of Congressional action in allocating more dollars for the subsidy program. Work continues to be done by lawmakers to keep ACP in the conversation for upcoming legislative moves. A bipartisan group has introduced an ACP Extension Act that would provide an additional \$7 billion for the program, and proponents are trying to get it included in packages being built to keep the federal government open. But those efforts have not yet bore any fruit. "There are a series of other legislative vehicles that will likely move forward in the next few months, in time to extend the program before current ACP customers are faced with the choice of increased payments or

losing service," **New Street Research** said in a note. "But it also suggests that the odds of an ACP extension remain low."

STREAMING COALITION FIGHTS AGAINST CALLS FOR NEW RULES

The **NAB** is spending time on Capitol Hill this week letting lawmakers know its positions on policy issues, and the **Preserve Viewer Choice Coalition** is also taking a moment to fight back against what it sees as the harmful views of the nation's large station groups. The coalition, which counts **Warner Bros. Discovery**, **YouTube TV**, **Hulu**, **Roku**, **Fubo** and the Big 4 broadcasters among its members, does not want the **FCC** to regulate vMVPDs in the same way that it does cable companies when it comes to the video arena and rules like must-carry. In a memo, the coalition noted that the FCC has established that it does not have the ability to make such a move on its own, and it said those regulations in the streaming ecosystem would increase consumer costs while harming innovation. "Currently, big station groups already can and do directly negotiate carriage of their content with streaming services like YouTube TV, Roku, Fubo, **LocalNow** and **NewsOn**. Or, if they prefer, they can often opt into the networks' agreements with the streaming services," the coalition said in the memo. "Requiring streamers to carry content their viewers did not ask for is a solution in search of a problem."

NTIA GIVES MORE DIGITAL EQUITY PLANS A THUMBS UP

NTIA has officially accepted the Digital Equity Plans of five more entities: Delaware, Idaho, Louisiana, Puerto Rico and West Virginia. That brings its total accepted to six with Maine notably being the first to have its plan given the green light, and the agency will continue to accept plans on a rolling basis. All 50 states, D.C. and Puerto Rico have submitted their plans to NTIA. The Digital Equity Plans and NTIA's programs surrounding digital equity work [hand-in-hand](#) with the BEAD program. "This year alone, nearly \$800 million will be available to states through our State Capacity Grant program when we launch our first funding opportunity this year," NTIA Digital Equity Director *Angela Thi Bennett* said in a [blog post](#).

MOODY'S BUMPS LIBERTY GLOBAL OUTLOOK TO NEGATIVE

Moody's is changing its **Liberty Global** outlook from stable to negative as it anticipates softness in operating performance in certain geographies like the U.K. and Belgium. "The negative

outlook on Liberty Global's rating reflects the rating agency's expectation that the company's operating performance will be soft over 2024/2025 and that its Moody's-adjusted leverage will remain elevated for the current rating over the same period," the firm wrote. "The negative outlook also reflects the overall uncertainties around the potential spin-off of the company's Swiss operations leading to a weakening in the business profile of the group." Moody's pointed to the UPC Holding B.V. sale reducing Liberty Global's scale and limiting its operational perimeter to five countries, while also negatively impacting its free cash flow profile. However, if Liberty Global's outlook is to swing back in the positive soon, Moody's is looking for significantly improved operating performance, firm-adjusted gross debt/EBITDA to fall below 4X on a sustained basis and adjusted cash flow from operations to improve above 25%.

SUPER TUESDAY PROGRAMMING

Networks are prepping their election coverage as Super Tuesday looms. **BET** will mark the night with the third installment of its Primetime Newsmagazine "America in Black" on Tuesday at 10:30pm. **CBS News** correspondent *Nikole Killion* will speak with Black voters in the key state of Georgia and the issues that matter to them now and come voting time in November. Also in the episode includes fellow CBS News correspondent *Danya Bachus* interviewing the cast of "Tyler Perry's Sistas" and a report on the life of *Kemba Smith*. – **C-SPAN's** coverage of Super Tuesday will begin at 8pm on the C-SPAN Networks, C-SPAN.org and the mobile app C-SPAN Now. Coverage will include results, speeches from candidates, analysis, viewer calls and more. – **Fox News'** *Bret Baier* and *Martha MacCallum* will lead the network's coverage in "Democracy 2024: Super Tuesday Primaries" starting at 7pm. A rotating roster of analysts and hosts will join the show to break down developments as they unfold. *Trace Gallagher* will take over hosting duties starting at 11pm before *Gillian Turner* and *Mike Emanuel* wrap things up from 1-4am. – **CNN's** "America's Choice 2024: Super Tuesday" will kick off at 4pm. *Jake Tapper* and *Anderson Cooper* will lead primetime coverage starting at 6pm as network correspondents across primary states will offer on-the-ground reports throughout the night.

RATINGS

Lifetime's documentary event "Where is Wendy Williams?" scored solid linear ratings as it averaged 1.2 million total viewers L+3 across Feb. 24 and 25. That made it the network's best new non-fiction performance in two years in total viewers, W25-64 and A25-64, while also lifting Lifetime to be the top cable network for W25-64 and W25-54 across the event's two nights. Where is Wendy Williams has 6.2 million total views across linear and digital to date. – Season 2 of **Hallmark Channel's** "The Way Home" has solidified itself as the most-watched program overall on entertainment cable among households, total viewers, W18+ and P18+ as it ap-

proaches the season's midway point. To date, the season has garnered 4.4 million unduplicated total viewers, according to **Nielsen** L+3 data. The Way Home has ranked in the top two most-watched entertainment cable programs of the week for W18+ for five consecutive episodes, and has also been a top two most-watched entertainment cable program for five straight Sundays across households, total viewers, W18+ and P18+.

CARRIAGE

The **WBD-owned MotorTrend FAST TV** is joining **Pluto TV's** lineup, bringing shows such as "Bitchin' Rides" and "Texas Metal." It continues the FAST channel's momentum after it had several partnerships in 2023 to reach over 100 million households.

FIBER FRENZY

Rural Telecommunications America and **DZS** are teaming up to continue bringing fiber internet to its 22-state footprint, and RTA is using products from DZS Velocity fiber access and Helix subscriber edge portfolios to bring gigFAST internet, voice and video services to residents and businesses in Texas' Bolivar Peninsula. RTA will be the first provider to introduce FTTH and multi-gig speeds to more than 6,000 residential and business customers in the area.

ADAPTIVE SPIRIT COUNTDOWN

With the industry's long-running **Adaptive Spirit** event set for April 4-7, time is running out to sign up as a sponsor. The gathering in Vail, formerly known as SkiTAM, is the top fundraiser for the U.S. Paralympic Ski and Snowboard teams. Visit Adaptive Spirit's [website](#) for more on sponsoring or reach out to *Cody Maxwell* at cody@keymaxmarketing.com.

PEOPLE

Ken Johnson was elevated to COO of **Cable One** from his previous position as the company's Chief Technology & Innovation Officer. He joined Cable One in 2018 after Cable One acquired **NewWave Communications**, and he'll add residential and business services to his responsibilities in the new role. *Mike Bowker* has held the COO post since May 2017. He now serves as Chief Growth Officer. – **Paramount Global's** *Lee Sears* is expanding his role and taking on the title of President, International Markets Advertising Sales. He'll report to Paramount Advertising President *John Halley* and President/CEO Paramount International Networks and Global Consumer Products *Pam Kaufman*, according to an internal memo obtained by **CFX**. Sears will be charged with leading international sales teams across streaming, pay TV and free to air broadcasters. – Former **Google** exec and **Yahoo** President/CEO *Marissa Mayer* was elected to the **AT&T** board. She'll serve on the Audit and Corporate Development and Finance committees. Mayer is currently the Co-Founder/CEO of a technology start-up Sunshine Products. Mayer has also served on the board of **Walmart** since 2012.