

Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Cost Conscious: Comcast's Watson Talks StreamSaver, CBRS

Comcast CEO, Connectivity and Platforms *Dave Watson* pulled back the curtain Tuesday on the company's StreamSaver initiative, including what the cost will ultimately be for budget-conscious consumers who are already part of the Xfinity ecosystem.

Launching to Comcast customers nationwide next week, the bundle includes **Peacock Premium**, **Netflix Standard** with ads and **Apple TV+** and will cost current and new internet or TV customers \$15/month. Customers will also be able to combine the bundled apps with **NOW TV**, the \$20/month streaming offering that offers FAST channels as well as more than 40 linear channels from the likes of **Hallmark**, **AMC** and more, for a combined monthly price of \$30. We'll have to see what customer uptake looks like, but if the numbers look good, expect Comcast to look at how to expand the StreamSaver brand.

"It's for the broadband customers looking for simple, easy alternatives and this is a great streaming set of packages to bring to the marketplace. So I'm pretty excited about it, I think it's a homerun for consumers," he said during an appearance at the J.P. Morgan Global Technology, Media and Communications Conference Tuesday. "I believe that StreamSaver, there's more to come, and it opens up, I think, a series of opportunities... we like this package, this approach but it certainly does open up possibilities down the road."

The streaming product comes at a time when Comcast is

doubling down on its offerings for value-focused customers, and Watson sees the addition of StreamSaver and the expansion of the company's prepaid offerings as real competition for the plans being put forth by fixed wireless providers.

"This is better broadband for customers that want a better experience for streaming, the straightforward applications. I think this is a better answer than fixed wireless, in my humble opinion," he said.

It's no coincidence that these changes are coming at the same time as the presumed end of the **FCC's** Affordable Connectivity Program. Watson knows the end of the program will bring elevated churn, but it is too early to predict whether the bulk of that will come during the second or third quarter of this year. Comcast is adopting a strategy that many others are taking in viewing this as a high-volume period of promotional roll-offs, and Watson is confident his team will be able to navigate the turbulence while still meeting previously-stated financial guidance.

"We know this is a very important moment for customers, and we're going to be very sensitive and careful how we do it," Watson said. "But we've become very accustomed to promotional rolls, so this is going to be that. A lot of them, but we're prepared and operationally ready and we have the product portfolio to back it up."

Mobile is a happy place for Comcast right now, securing hundreds of thousands of new lines each quarter and staying steady while broadband net adds remain hard to come by. Watson said he thinks Comcast's combination of broadband

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with **Xfinity Mobile** is one of the best double play packages that cable has in the marketplace and the team is continuing to add to the playbook as it continues to compete with the traditional wireless providers.

There has long been talk about cable providers' experimentation with using CBRS spectrum to offload traffic in a number of markets, and Comcast has actively deployed the spectrum in three markets at this point. To Watson, it is a great option to have in the company's back pocket, but it will remain a strategy that will be used sparingly and only in the markets where it makes sense to do so.

"It's a specific offload in the heaviest part of the traffic areas, so we don't have to deploy it widely. We can have it surgically deployed where we need it," he said. "We're technically at the point where we can begin to do more if we want to, so it's not a huge capital thing. We're continuing to look at that and I think a pretty steady approach towards it, but a nice opportunity in the long run."

NTIA LEADS CHARGE TO 6G

NTIA launched a [request for comment](#) Tuesday inquiring how government policies can support the development of 6G technology. The RFC asks a number of questions around the enabling of 6G's success and R&D, including when 6G technology is expected to begin lab and field trials and subsequently become commercially available. It also looks at safety and environmental issues with questions around how 6G could improve network resiliency during disaster and recovery operations. Importantly, the RFC is not centered on spectrum issues that could be related to 6G. Comments are due 90 days from publication in the Federal Register, and feedback will be used to develop a report to inform policy related to the technology.

GROUPS ASK HOUSE COMMERCE TO SLOW DOWN ON SECTION 230

A group of 10 organizations including **INCOMPAS** and **CTA** sent a letter to **House Commerce** leadership with their concerns around a bipartisan discussion draft of legislation that would sunset Section 230. The group noted their understanding that this is an attempt to reform the protections and bring large tech companies to the table to figure out a new path forward for the digital landscape. But the stakeholders also said the narrow framing of the Section 230 debate around Big Tech could lead to a number of unintended consequences for everybody that lives outside of that bubble. "The heaviest costs and burdens of such action would fall on the millions of stakeholders we represent who, unlike large companies, do not have the resources to navi-

gate a flood of content-based lawsuits," the letter said. "While it may seem that such changes will not 'break the internet,' this perspective overlooks the intricate interplay of legal liability and innovation that underpins the entire digital infrastructure."

MAX TAKES ON EUROPE

Max is up and running in 20 countries across Europe. They are: Andorra, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Hungary, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, and Sweden. Max replaces the legacy **HBO Max** service that was available in those countries. Customers will now get double the content previously available, which includes the upcoming Season 2 premiere of **HBO's** "House of the Dragon" that premieres June 17 and the ongoing qualifying rounds of the French Open. Other titles currently available include "Dune: Part Two" as well as the films "Barbie," "Wonka" and "Joker."

PROVIDERS STEP UP IN WAKE OF HOUSTON STORMS

Connectivity and mobile providers are stepping up following the severe storms that swept through Houston and the Gulf Coast. **Charter's** service for the vast majority of Spectrum customers across the Houston metroplex wasn't impacted by storm damage, though some are still dealing with a loss of power. **Verizon** is waiving domestic call, text and data usage costs incurred by postpaid consumer customers, small business customers and Verizon Prepaid customers in storm-affected areas across Texas and Louisiana. That'll be in place through Thursday. Customers using Straight Talk, Tracfone, Total, Simple Mobile, Walmart Family Mobile, Net10, GoSmart and Page Plus will have service end dates extended to Thursday as well. Customers don't need to take any action, and any overages for closed billing cycles will be credited back. Verizon said engineers restored over half of the initially impacted sites as of Friday and are currently working to restore service for the remaining impacted customers. **T-Mobile** said while some of its network sites in the Houston area were impacted by commercial power outages, most customers maintained some level of service due to overlapping coverage. The uncarrrier sent community support teams to Houston and the greater Harris County area to supply WiFi device charging and charging supplies, and it's working with state and local officials to assist with connectivity needs. For **AT&T**, it said its wireless network in Texas was operating at more than 99% of normal as of Saturday morning. Its network in Louisiana and Mississippi were also operating as normal.

TIVO REVEALS NEW CROSS-SCREEN AD PLATFORM

TiVo is combining ad inventory across multiple endpoints in the home and car with a new, cross-screen advertising platform **TiVo One**. The product will enable advertisers to have branded campaigns reach desired audiences with forecasting, targeting and measurement capabilities. That reach encompasses streaming, IPTV, smart TV and connected automotive devices. **TiVo One** also offers a graphic display that's combined with video and image expansion.

ESPN RE-UPS FA CUP DEAL

The oldest and longest-running national cup competition in soccer is staying with **ESPN** in the U.S. The sports network and the English Football Association (FA) extended their media rights agreement for the FA Cup through 2027-28. **ESPN+** will remain the home for 79 FA Cup matches over each of the next four seasons. The deal also includes the FA Community Shield, which pits the previous season's FA Cup winners against the winners of the Premier League. **ESPN+** has been the FA Cup streaming destination in the U.S. since the 2018-19 season.

RATINGS

It's now been four consecutive weeks that **TNT** found itself as the top-rated cable network in primetime. Last week (May 13-19) it was the only network to eclipse the three-million mark with 3.26 million viewers P2+. **ESPN** also surpassed others with 2.25 million viewers, with both networks getting bumps as the **NBA** and **NHL** had playoff series go the Game 7 distance. **Fox News** put up a strong 1.99 million viewers, followed by **MSNBC's** average of 1.15 million and **HGTV's** 647,000. It was a newsy top two when it came to total-day ratings, with **Fox News** and **MSNBC** recording 1.3 million and 831,000 viewers, respectively. **TNT** (797,000) and **ESPN** (771,000) found their way in as well, with **CNN** capping the total-day top five with 471,000. – **ESPN's** coverage of the **PGA** Championship second round averaged 1.6 million viewers. That's an improvement of 18% compared to the second round coverage of the 2023 tournament. The ratings bump may have to do with the early morning development of World No. 1 golfer **Scottie Scheffler** being briefly arrested and released before his scheduled tee time. Friday's coverage peaked at 2 million viewers during the 6-6:15pm window. Additionally, the alternate telecast "ESPN BET at the PGA Championship" averaged 323,000 viewers on **ESPN2** after averaging 164,000 viewers during the first round Thursday. That preceded the "PGA Championship with No Laying Up" altcast that aired on **ESPN2** as well, with that one nabbing 155,000 viewers—up from 89,000 on Thursday.

PROGRAMMING

"Ugliest House in America" was renewed for a six-episode

season from **HGTV**. It's slated for a 2025 premiere. The network also greenlit a four-episode spinoff "Scariest House in America," which stars actress and comedian **Retta** as she visits properties that owners claim are haunted. That one will debut in time for Halloween festivities in October. – **ESPN+** rolled out a three-part original series "Up For Debate: The Evolution of Sports Media" today. The docuseries chronicles how sports talk debate shows have changed across seven decades and how they've impacted discussions and discourse among fans. – *David Attenborough's* next natural history series will arrive July 13. "Mammals" will premiere that day at 8pm on **BBC America**, with **AMC+** having it available to stream the same day. – **AT&T** is collaborating with **Candle Media's ATTN:** on a documentary to spotlight the lives of those impacted by the digital divide. "Route to Connection" will focus on the community of Amarillo, Texas, which has one of the lowest internet connection rates in the U.S. The program will be available to stream on **ATTN:**'s **YouTube** and **Facebook** pages on June 14.

HALLMARK'S UNWRAPS NEW CHRISTMAS PACKAGE

Hallmark is launching its first-ever Hallmark Christmas Experience, Nov. 29-Dec. 23 outside Hallmark HQ at Kansas City's Crown Center. The free, open-to-the-public experience will feature the charm of a Hallmark movie town square, a Christmas market with event-exclusive Hallmark products, ice skating, festive food and nightly tree lightings. VIP tickets went on sale Thursday for premier experiences, including photos ops with Hallmark stars and behind-the-scenes experiences. Tickets range from \$259 to \$699, with the more expensive option already sold out for some dates.

PEOPLE

Hallmark Media's programming department is getting a shakeup as the company looks to continue its expansion in content creation. VP, Programming **Kelly Garrett** will oversee the development of Hallmark Media's scripted content. She'll work with **Kate Redinger**—who was recently promoted to Senior Director, Programming—in leading Hallmark's scripted series. The department changes also target Hallmark Media's enterprise-focused programming. VP, Programming **Jessica Callahan** will manage the creative evolution of Hallmark Channel rom-coms, **Hallmark Mysteries**, Hallmark Hall of Fame and Mahogany-branded content. Fellow VP, Programming **Jennifer Kramer** will head up holiday content and the DaySpring brand, and **Camden Simmons** will step into the role of Director, Programming, and lead a dedicated holiday team. – **GVTC Communications** named **Josh Pettiette** as its next President/CEO, replacing the current company leader **Ritchie Sorrells**, who is retiring. Pettiette, who was previously **GVTC's** VP, Product, Business Development and Strategic Planning, has been with the company for more than 20 years. He'll officially assume the position July 1.