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WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Blazing Trails: How Does FAST Shape Up Against Cable?

It wasn't too long ago when the **StreamTV Show** had the moniker the Pay TV Show. The fact that FAST dominated the opening sessions of this year's event, along with the "Stream" label, shows just how much times have changed in the video world.

The opening salvo of the 2025 edition of the StreamTV Show drew many historical analogies, led by **TVREV** Lead Analyst *Alan Wolk* equating the current state of media to the decline of the Roman Empire. The Empire's eventual lack of a central authority and standardization was an easy parallel with today's fragmentation, and while Wolk doesn't think we're in the Dark Ages yet, "The Vandals have indeed sacked Rome." Vandals referring to streamers, CTV platforms and FAST players, and Rome being the long-standing foundation of cable TV.

FAST channels have been gaining momentum, and there's a belief among show attendees that this year will see a boost with improvements to customers' and advertisers' experiences. But that doesn't mean it's a perfect solution to the declining pay TV landscape. During a panel on the current state of FAST, **Rasenberger Media** CEO *Cathy Rasenberger* brought up concerns with the lack of data transparency, accountability and standardized measurements. *David Purdy*, CRO for **Stingray**, harkened back to his days in cable, having spent more than 15 years at **Rogers Communications** as well as having launched several Canadian specialty channels throughout his career. He's focused on not repeating some mistakes he's seen over the years.

"I was part of the old regime, and I constantly think back to Roman history and the decline of the cable regime. I think weak things get broken, and in this case, weakness was [a] lack of customer centricity," Purdy said during the session. "I can't tell you how many meetings I sat in where people were like, 'We don't want to do that because it'll disrupt the existing model.' Or, if you watch **Netflix**'s rapacious march through our industry, destroying shareholder value on the cable side, everybody sort of sat back."

Jen Gale, Director, Digital Advertising Sales for **Xumo**, sits in an interesting position, considering Xumo's status as a joint venture between cable giants **Charter** and **Comcast**. Xumo's goal is to fuse the linear cable experience with streaming in a centralized place, which "presents a really unique first-party data set, in the sense that we can really capture the broader households' viewing behaviors in that ecosystem," she said, touting that the data enables Xumo to improve personalization and offer relevant content based on a household's consumption trends.

"I agree with the statement that content is king, but I think ultimately what's going to prevail is really the ease of discoverability of that content and the personalization of that content," Gale added. Personalization has been one of Xumo's prevailing themes even before it launched.

On the CTV side, **Magnite** Streaming VP *Geoff Spence* thinks the platform provides easier access to newer ad formats. Spence was particularly bullish on recent developments like pause ads—though that might be because Magnite helped **Fubo** launch programmatic pause ads recently—as well as tiles on homescreens.

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"CTV allows for newer formats that have historically been sold [through] primarily direct IO-managed service," Spence said. "It's just such a premium user experience to be able to hit a very specific, engaged user. And it's about thinking, how do we bring that to the programmatic ecosystem?"

CAR COMPLAINS TO CARR AGAIN

The **Center for American Rights** (CAR) is back at the **FCC** to allege media bias. This time, it's focused on "left-wing rants" from **ABC**'s *Terry Moran* and *CBS*' *Scott Pelley.* In a letter to FCC Chair *Brendan Carr* Tuesday, CAR President *Daniel Suhr* pointed to Moran's remarks on **X** that called *Trump* and his Deputy Chief of Staff *Stephen Miller* "world-class hater[s]." **ABC** suspended Moran on Sunday, later announcing it was not renewing his contract. CAR complained that **CBS**' Pelley delivered commencement remarks last month at Wake Forest that were "no less pugilistic in asserting his dislike for Donald Trump." Suhr quoted Pelley as saying, "Our sacred rule of law is under attack. Journalism is under attack. Universities are under attack. Freedom of speech is under attack. An insidious fear is reaching through our schools, our businesses, our homes and into our private thoughts," claiming Pelley is referring to Trump as the "unnamed source of these attacks." He noted that Pelley referenced lawsuits against journalists, threats against universities and the administration's targeting of DEI. The group rattled off a list of what it views as problems—from the editing in a CBS "60 Minutes" interview to ABC's handling of a debate between Trump and Harris to ABC, CBS and **NBC** displaying "an obvious bias" against Trump in their coverage of the first 100 days of his new term. "This is a pattern, Mr. Chairman, in the past year: consistent, persistent, overt misuse of the public airwaves to advance a political viewpoint on the part of all three networks, not through editorials but through workaday news reporting," Suhr wrote, imploring the FCC to "act to restore public trust in those who use the public airwaves." The letter referenced the FCC's 1975 decision to deny license renewals for five radio stations owned by **Star Stations** of Indiana because of misconduct, including improperly using newscasts to publicize certain candidates' campaigns.

TUBI'S TAKES

Don't look now, but **Tubi** feels primed to solidify its spot in both the free TV space and overall media landscape. Chief Content Officer *Adam Lewinson* spoke in a fireside chat at StreamTV Show about where the free streamer stands among the crowd, and his confident demeanor stemmed from three areas: the belief that Tubi understands where the future of TV is heading, a prioritization of personalization and the brand value it holds with its audience. Recently, Tubi has been in the spotlight for its original movie "Sidelined: The QB and Me," and in **Nielsen's** latest Media Distributor Gauge, it took 2% of the overall viewership pie in April, beating out the likes of **Peacock**, **Max** and **Apple TV+**. However, looming tall beyond those competitors is **YouTube**, which continues to hold the largest share of viewing time among media companies. "If you think about YouTube, they have nearly endless user-generated content for free, primarily short form. If you look at the other major player, **Netflix** is premium entertainment behind the paywall. Where we see Tubi's space in this ecosystem is somewhere in between. Tubi is the home of free premium entertainment," Lewinson said. When it comes to FAST channels, Lewinson holds a counter-narrative that isn't as rosy as what some other folks see. His view derives from how FAST channels work on Tubi, and an understanding that its viewers don't have the consumption habits that fit what a primarily FAST channel platform brings. "I know who our viewers are. I know what they want to watch. Since our viewers are younger than most streamers, they're not interested in linear. They don't want to watch a feed. They don't want to watch a movie that starts in the middle. They want to go to the beginning," he said.

ECHOSTAR'S ERGEN HAS A FRIEND IN EX-FCC COMMISH SIMINGTON

Former **FCC** commissioner *Nathan Simington* doesn't seem to share *Brendan Carr*'s views on **EchoStar**. Less than a week after leaving the Commission, Simington penned an op/ed critiquing the investigation as "seriously market-disruptive" and a threat to national security. Last month, Carr directed the agency to probe EchoStar's 5G buildout compliance and its use of 2 GHz spectrum licenses and the potential sharing of the licenses. EchoStar has said the inquiries threaten its viability, with Simington in agreement. "EchoStar claims to have met its commitments, so moving to threaten its licenses seems extremely market-disruptive out of proportion to any claimed offense," he wrote. The Republican added that EchoStar has built the only American OpenRAN network, which excludes Chinese suppliers accused of threatening national security. "Put it all together, and there's only one conclusion. One of the most innovative companies in American telecommunications is at risk of suffering an unprecedented and unpredictable punishment. We're all going to pay a price for it as the effects ramify through the markets, and it's going to hurt our international competitiveness. The FCC should reverse course. If not, China won't have to beat us—we'll have beaten ourselves," Simington concluded. **New Street Research**'s *Blair Levin* looked beyond the content of the missive and mused over whom he intended to influence, with FCC nominee *Olivia Trusty* an obvious target. With her confirmation hearing taking place before

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Carr launched the probe, she hasn't had a chance to weigh in on the issue. The op/ed could also get the attention of the White House as it weighs a replacement for Simington. "Simington is also reaching out, in his way, to other MAGA influencers, who may see this through the lens of the intra-MAGA fight between *[Steve] Bannon* and *[Elon] Musk*. That is, while Musk is the main beneficiary of Carr's actions, Simington's editorial might cause some like Bannon to object to both helping Musk and hurting our position relative to China," Levin wrote in a research note.

STREAMTV SHOW NOTEBOOK

As FAST platforms further develop in the U.S., maybe folks can take a few notes from our European friends. With FAST, Europe started much further ahead due to the prevalence of free-to-air channels, but that's made it challenging for consumers to properly differentiate FAST products, according to *Bernd Riefler*, Founder/CEO of the AI video editing company **Veed**. That's why he thinks the sooner linear and FAST channels work hand in hand, the better. "Successful services in Europe, basically, we're just enhancing their linear offer," he said, pointing to **DAZN** acquiring the rights for the upcoming FIFA Club World Cup. "This is also kind of a FAST model at the end, but the ultimate target in their mature market is then to convert consumers into the paying world," Riefler said. He later predicted that there would be a merging of traditional linear and FAST, saying it's "just a matter of time" and that "FAST will certainly help accelerate this shift." However, like others, he's wary of the juggernauts that are **Google** and **Amazon**. "Looking at what Amazon is doing in that area, Fire TV channels, etc., that's kind of scary," he said. "Speaking about empires, they already are an empire. The level of vertical integration is tremendous, and they're also capable of [scaling] internationally." – It was ironic that the fall of the Roman Empire and the supposed path toward the Dark Ages was a lasting theme to kick off this year's StreamTV Show, given that the Gaylord Rockies had power outage issues Wednesday that threw a wrench in registration and slightly delayed the opening keynote. Nonetheless, on the topic of Europe, StreamTV Show is headed to Lisbon next year from April 12-14.

PEOPLE

Guy Griggs will join **CNN** as its new SVP of Ad Sales and Client Partnerships later this month, overseeing the sales portfolio for all news products. Griggs previously served as VP of National Sales at *The New York Times* and also held roles at *The Washington Post* and **CNN International.**

In The WILD

A Cablefax feature highlighting industry doings spotted in the real world.

2025 Cynopsis Sports Media Awards

In the modern media environment that's riddled with intense competition, some nights are reserved to sit back and celebrate the accomplishments made in the pursuit of answering, "What's next?" ***Cablefax***'s sister brand *Cynopsis* held its 14th annual Sports Media Awards last week to shine a light on the folks making a difference across sports media, marketing, technology and beyond.



Five luminaries set the stage throughout the event, held at City Winery in New York City. Aflac won Brand of the Year, while the New York Mets' work with McDonald's and Grimace earned the Brand Collaboration of the Year honor. Togethxr, a brand created to promote women's sports, took home Media Platform of the Year. Professional Bull Riders and Monumental Sports & Entertainment were awarded League of the Year and Media Company of the Year, respectively.

"It is our focus to continuously push boundaries in sports media and local sports content to create more value for our fans," Zach Leonsis, President, Media and New Enterprises for Monumental Sports & Entertainment, said at the event.

As usual, PBR CEO Sean Gleason stayed true to his organization's roots when accepting a Luminary. "It's an honor to win an award in a room of sports dignitaries where I'm the only guy wearing a cowboy hat," he said. Gleason's cowboy hat wasn't the only spectacle at the event. Hot Shot Swanson and Speedy Artis from the Harlem Globetrotters were on hand to reveal some of the winners, even performing some dazzling basketball moves on stage.

Monumental has been busy these past few years. After rebranding from the former NBC Sports Washington moniker, Monumental Sports Network has since debuted a direct-to-consumer option, all while moving into a new studio that's nestled next to Capital One Arena in D.C.



and providing around-the-clock coverage of Alex Ovechkin's chase to break the NHL's goal-scoring record. Other awards Monumental won included Best Media Spaces & Facilities and Best New Sports Show for "Mystics Courtside," a co-winner alongside Underdog Sports' "Heed the Call."

Eric Shanks, CEO/Executive Producer of Fox Sports, was recognized with the Navigator Award. He's guided the company with its "Summer of Soccer" amid EURO 2024 and Copa América, followed six months later by Fox's broadcast of Super Bowl LIX and another edition of the Daytona 500.

Monumental wasn't the only RSN to take home hardware. NESN was named the RSN of the Year, and YES Network's app earned the Mobile App honor. – *Noah Ziegler*

O'Rielly's TMT Whiteboard

Enact An AI Moratorium

By Michael O'Rielly

A few months ago, I used this column to argue that Artificial Intelligence (AI)—at least in the communications consumer services sector—should be regulated smartly and narrowly, and more appropriately, not at all. Yet, the more federal policymakers hear about AI and withhold their natural urges to impose new restrictions and views on the technology and its use, some state officials are rushing ahead with a myriad of mandates and burdens. The absence of federal action is empowering thousands of new AI-related bills in statehouses across the country. In turn, it is leading to a varied collection of troublesome laws being enacted. To nix this foolishness, federal lawmakers are justifiably seeking a moratorium on state and local laws and regulations involving aspects of AI—a step that deserves wide support and adoption.

Lest anyone raises a complaint about Federalism, AI is undoubtably an interstate service, and the underlying communications networks are the same. In fact, it is hard to see any aspect of AI to be intrastate in nature. To argue that the federal government cannot or should not set the rules, if any, for an interstate offering ignores the clear lines delineated in the Commerce Clause to the U.S. Constitution. The simple fact that federal policymakers decide not to regulate does not, in an of itself, open the door to state authority. Such a notion would be a perverse viewpoint on preemption.

Substantively, allowing some state, or God forbid, local government, to oversee AI ignores the changing world that has evolved since the lines of authority were drawn through court precedent. The Brandeisian belief that "states are the laboratory of democracy" seems quaint and dubious in concept and practice when seen through the prism of a global AI economy. Were it once that states acted to help shape a critical policy solution that could be replicated elsewhere or applied nationally, a patchwork of conflicting state laws now leads to a confusion among businesses and a compliance spiral to the most restrictive state. Equally troubling, certain states have effectively become tools by which groups or policymakers seek to prod the federal government to action of their likings. That is, not laboratories but advocacy centers.

Even for split jurisdictional issues, Congress has a strong history of protecting technology and corresponding services. Previous moratoriums have successfully served to stave off burdens before the technology could be fully developed. Most famously, the Internet Tax Freedom Act provided years of protection—eventually made permanent—from state taxation of Internet access and discriminatory taxation. Intellectually sound, the moratorium prevented states from picking apart the Internet like a pack of wolves devouring a baby calf. And any lost tax revenue was far surpassed by the enormous growth in economic productivity and income taxes paid by high tech companies.



Likewise, at the turn of the century, Congress pursued a Federal and state regulatory moratorium over Voice over Internet Protocol (VOIP) communications during its infancy. While legislation was never enacted into law, the spirit of the moratorium allowed the technology to soar to the majority of the voice market over the clutches of telecom regulators. This generated massive efficiencies and cost sharing throughout the communications industry.

On the flip side of the coin, there are many instances when the federal government couldn't agree on a state moratorium or preemption in a key policy area, leading to complete havoc and improperly tilting the market in a negative way. Take commercial privacy, for example. Despite efforts made by many, Congress didn't prevent the states from acting. What resulted has been one of the biggest government-caused messes in commercial history. Over the last 20 plus years, handfuls of states have enacted privacy statutes full of over-regulations, unnecessary burdens, and useless mandates. Worse yet, these statutes often conflict with each other, leaving companies in very precarious situations with competing enforcement exposure. Untangling such chaos at this stage is going to be extremely difficult.

An AI moratorium on state and local involvement will bring necessary stability and certainty for AI creators, developers, investors, and users. In the past, it's been a successful path to ensure vital technology has a chance to succeed in the marketplace. Congress should rightfully move this concept into law at its earliest opportunity.

(Michael O'Rielly is a former FCC Commissioner and congressional staffer who serves as President at MPO-Rielly Consulting. His views do not necessarily reflect the views of Cablefax.)