

Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Life Independent: Reelz Among Indy Nets Navigating Upfronts

Economic uncertainty is plaguing all corners of the market, and with this year's upfronts well underway, the ambiguous outlook into the future makes it that much harder for folks to transact. For the independent programmers looking to stand out in a crowded space, it means relying on your assets while adapting to the changing landscape that's forced folks to prioritize digital platforms more.

A prevailing theme during this year's upfront presentations was the [importance of live sports](#)—a sentiment felt for both broadcasters and streamers. However, there are only so many coveted live sports assets available, and with advertisers' focus shifting away from singular properties and toward what a platform can offer, it puts more value on a company's overall content portfolio.

"I do believe that content still is very important, but it has to be in the right place at the right time," **Reelz** EVP/Head of Advertising Sales *Scott Kohn* told **CFX**. "I thought it was very interesting that most of the companies are talking more about their platforms rather than specific shows, other than the big events and things like that. Streaming continues to be where the viewers are going, which is where the clients [are] following. The dollars are following the viewers."

In Kohn's view, another coveted topic is the idea of flexibility. That's certainly drawn the spotlight as folks figure out cross-platform strategies, but it gives independent companies like

Reelz an opportunity to entice brands to buy more ads. This year, Reelz introduced a data-driven linear platform that delivers advanced audiences with precision timing. More recently, it was part of a group of companies that launched Audyns, which looks to aggregate independent networks, their linear inventory and sell it all together in an effort to enhance scale.

"We're an independent network, so what we're really out there talking about is the audience that our content delivers," Kohn said. "We want to be a sales organization that's easy to transact with, that clients want to do business with—and that means everything from flexibility to customers, customer service [and] delivering deals. But ultimately, we're trying to stand out with the audience that we deliver."

For Reelz, which still has most of its business on linear, it has to figure out ways to combat the viewership shift to streaming products. That may be tricky without owning any sports rights, but it checks the "live programming" category with its popular "On Patrol: Live" series that debuted in July 2022.

Since that launch, Reelz has seen an estimated 130% increase in its audience. Kohn touted the loyalty that fans show with real crime and law enforcement content, noting that viewers are tuning into its content for more than two hours each weekend. Reelz isn't the only one that's benefited from an interest in criminal proceedings, with **Court TV** and **Law & Crime**, for example, [recording ratings surges](#) as they covered the highly publicized *Johnny Depp v. Amber Heard* trial.

"We've really seen a shift in how advertisers are perceiving our

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network out our brand,” Kohn said. “What I really found was we’re sitting in one of the hottest genres, and we’re one of the only networks that delivers that genre all day, every day, and it’s live.”

Although its flagship franchise is sorted, the equation changes to figuring out how to flaunt the content Reelz has beyond On Patrol. It carries the original “Cops” franchise as well as “Crisis Point,” “Gangsters: America’s Most Evil” and “Autopsy.” While Kohn isn’t engulfed in the content side of things, he and Reelz dug into its audience to conduct research and broaden its content offerings.

“We really dug into what are these viewers like? We put On Patrol: Live on and we found this audience that is passionate. What else do they like? What kind of research can we do on our audience to help us develop additional shows so that we’re not just the number one network on Friday and Saturday nights? How do we start building other nights? That’s where we are right now,” Kohn said.

Reelz is adjusting to the digital ecosystem, too. The network rolled out its direct-to-consumer product **Reelz+** in March for a normal rate of \$4.99 per month or \$59.98 per year. “We’re confident that as Reelz+ scales, it’s more than a streaming app. It’s a way to extend our top content ... We recognize the importance of scale,” Kohn said.

Reelz is also keeping an eye on how to further build out its FAST channel presence. It has some exposure on different OTT platforms, but the focus is on getting Reelz+ up to full speed. Once it gets data and insights into viewership tendencies, the company can better develop its FAST strategy.

EVER-EXPANDING MVNO MARKET

A *Washington Post* writer tried to sign up for **Trump Mobile**’s service and ended up instead penning a bit of a love letter to cable’s MVNO offerings. Tech writer *Shira Ovide* [wrote](#) this week that Trump Mobile billed her credit card for a cost “considerably higher than the advertised price,” and she ran into multiple issues trying to activate the service on her phone. Then she goes on to note that price comparison site [Navi](#) found that most folks would save money by dropping **AT&T**, **Verizon** or **T-Mobile** for mobile service sold by **Comcast** or **Charter**. Her piece also noted smaller mobile phone providers led by **U.S. Mobile**, **Consumer Cellular**, **Mint Mobile** and **Ting** reported the highest perceived value and overall service in recent *Consumer Reports* surveys. Those small providers and cable operators both use the big carriers’ networks for traffic, though cable claims an advantage with its WiFi networks and CBRS backhaul (plus cost savings by bundling the service with internet, not to mention its decades of experience with customer management of subscriptions). While Trump Mobile said

it’s working with all three carriers, **New Street Research** noted that the terms of service say it’s “powered by **Liberty Mobile Wireless LLC**” which it understands to be an MVNO of T-Mobile. Initial reaction to the Trump Mobile offering has been lackluster. Beyond the issues outlined by Ovide, the price and services aren’t particularly compelling. Not to mention that MVNO offerings are popping up nearly as quickly as FAST channels did a few years ago. Flex payment provider **Klarna** announced its entry into the market Wednesday, promising uncapped, unlimited 5G data, talk and text for \$40/month, with coverage on the AT&T network. It is supposed to launch in the coming weeks in the U.S. with the U.K., Germany, and more to follow. Meanwhile, cable operators who haven’t launched mobile yet are close or are in the early innings. As [CFX first reported last year](#), **Midco** expects to launch mobile this year or early next (it has trademarked the name **Midco Mobile**), **Buckeye Broadband** rolled out **Maxx Mobile** in December and **Schurz Communications** has been steadily launching **Flight Mobile** across its systems. All eyes are on longtime mobile holdout **Cable One**.

NETFLIX STRIKES DEAL TO CARRY LIVE CHANNELS IN FRANCE

Netflix secured a carriage deal with French broadcaster **TF1** to distribute its free-to-air live TV channels and VOD content on the platform. When the integration launches next summer, it’ll allow French users to access all of TF1’s programming through their existing Netflix subscription without having to leave the platform. The financial details of the agreement have not been disclosed. There are a few reasons why Netflix is teaming up with TF1. The companies have been creative partners for years, co-producing multiple series, including Netflix’s first daily French drama, “Tout Pour La Lumière” (“All for Light”), which hit the platform last week before premiering on TF1 and the TF1+ streaming service a few days later. With TF1 on its platform, Netflix will also unlock lucrative live sports events, including French national team soccer matches. Tapping into France’s most-watched TV network is a way for Netflix to continue to grow its programming’s reach and ad revenue in the country, where TF1 commands the 58 million monthly viewers via its broadcast channels. Meanwhile, TF1 will have access to Netflix’s millions of subscribers in the country (although it’s unclear how the streamer and broadcaster are splitting subscription and ad revenue). Through the deal, Netflix may also satisfy legal requirements to reinvest 20-25% of revenue earned in France into French content. But this might be about more than France. The TF1 partnership provides a testing ground for how the streamer could work with broadcasters in other markets, including in the U.S. Netflix Co-CEO *Greg Peters* told *The Financial Times* that

Netflix would wait and see how things went with TF1 before trying to make similar deals with other broadcasters, but it's becoming easier to see why traditional TV would turn to the streamer to ramp up viewership, which continues to decline across cable and broadcast. Just this week, a new Nielsen report said that streaming TV viewing eclipsed cable and broadcast usage combined. After today, there will certainly be questions about what Netflix can do for linear networks in need of a streaming defibrillator.

FCC JUNE MEETING

We're frantically refreshing the **FCC** page to see if *Olivia Trusty* had been added to the leadership section (not yet!), but official word came Wednesday that the agency will proceed with its June 26 open meeting. It's not a terribly scintillating agenda, though cable will appreciate an item directed at cleaning up rate regulation as well as an update loosening the engineer certification requirements for biannual Broadband Data Collection filings. After confirming Trusty as an FCC commissioner on Tuesday to fill the remaining term of *Jessica Rosenworcel*, the Senate voted Wednesday (again 53-45) to confirm her for a five-year term that starts July 1.

WHAT TIKTOK BAN?

President *Trump* intends to once again sign an executive order giving **TikTok** a 90-day extension of a federal law that would have banned the app in the U.S. this past January because it hasn't cut ties with Beijing-based owner **ByteDance**. "Once again, the Trump administration is flouting the law and ignoring its own national security findings about the risks posed by a PRC-controlled TikTok. An executive order can't sidestep the law, but that's exactly what the president is trying to do," Senate Select Committee on Intelligence Vice Chairman *Mark R. Warner* (D-VA) said Wednesday. Before Trump appointed him chair of the **FCC**, *Brendan Carr* [frequently voiced concerns](#) about the app and potential security risks. He's been pretty quiet on the issue since Trump reversed his position on banning the app.

WHODUNNIT? ACORN TV...

Acorn TV's first Murder Mystery May killed it. The streamer notched more than 20 million hours watched for the first time in its more than a decade-long history. Unique engaged subscribers also achieved an all-time high, up double digits from the streamer's average over the past 12 months. New subscription sign-ups hit a four-year high, up 70% from the prior 12-month average. The month-long programming stunt included a new season of "Harry Wild" (just renewed for a fifth season) and new Welsh mystery "The One That Got Away."

TUBI CREATORS PROGRAM

Maybe it's a result of the success from "Sidelined: The QB and Me" starring *Noah Beck*, or it's an effort to entice content

creators away from the grasp of **YouTube**. Either way, **Tubi** is introducing a new program designed to accelerate its investment in developing original programs from creators called "Tubi for Creators." It encompasses Tubi's already existing Stubios, the recently announced partnership with Kickstarter and a scalable pathway for digital creators to bring their content to the platform. Overseeing the program will be *Rich Bloom*, who's spent several years at **Vimeo** and will take on the title of GM, Creator Programs & EVP, Business Development. The program will begin with six inaugural partners who bring over 500 videos of episodic content.

NAD SPLIT ON T-MOBILE'S VERIZON CHALLENGES

The **National Advertising Division** delivered its rulings in a challenge lobbied by **T-Mobile** regarding claims related to **Verizon**'s satellite texting services. The Division concluded that the challenged claims "Verizon Satellite Powered" and "Verizon is conquering dead zones with satellite" don't convey the message that only Verizon has that capability or that its competitors don't, thus no changes were suggested. When it came to other independent claims about Verizon's satellite abilities, NAD found that its partnership with AST SpaceMobile remains in the testing stages, thus not being able to convey to customers how exactly satellite texting is achieved (including whether it's done through Verizon's network or otherwise). NAD recommended Verizon ensure any accompanying disclosures describe the availability of satellite texting features clearly in future advertising. For Verizon's "America's largest network" claim that included the disclosure "'Largest network' based on total postpaid phone connections publicly reported by Verizon, T-Mobile, and AT&T, Q3 '24," NAD decided the "largest network" portion was ambiguous and potentially conveys different messages to consumers. It also found that "postpaid phone connections" might not clearly refer to Verizon customers, but the claim could be substantiated if properly qualified with an appropriate disclosure. NAD recommended Verizon modify its disclosure. Verizon had already discontinued the challenged implied claims relating to satellite-supported texting and its wireless network, but it'll comply with NAD's other recommendations.

FIBER FRENZY

The town of East Haven, Connecticut, is next in line to join **GoNetspeed**'s footprint. The company's \$7.5 million project will bring its services to more than 13,000 addresses. Plans to break ground have been set for this summer, with the first residents and businesses expected to go live shortly after construction begins.

RATINGS

Caitlin Clark continues to be a ratings magnet for the **WNBA**. Saturday's Liberty vs Fever game averaged 2.2 million view-



How I got **HERE**

**TONY
Krueck**

SVP, MOBILE & PRODUCT
COX COMMUNICATIONS



Cox Communications is getting ready to undergo a transformative time in the company's history, but mergers are far from a smooth process. While there are exciting aspects to Cox's imminent \$34.5 billion merger with Charter, there's still uncertainty about what truly lies ahead for some of the employees and those involved with the combination process. Luckily for Cox, it has experienced leadership to guide it through unknown waters, including the chief of its mobile operations Tony Krueck.

Krueck spoke in a fireside chat hosted by NAMIC last month, touching on what influenced his leadership philosophy, the current landscape of telecommunications and what he's learned over the course of his nearly 40-year career—not to mention the 12 years of military service as well.

His first test of leadership came when Krueck was 25 years old. He was tasked with building one of the first Sprint PCS markets in Milwaukee, noting that he had never managed a large team at that point. However, the aspect of creating something from scratch was enticing to him, a theme that would continue throughout his career and can be seen through his work in getting Cox Mobile off the ground.

But as Krueck learned the ropes of leadership, he “ran into many issues,” one of which centered on how he spent his time with colleagues outside of the office. That created a sense of favoritism among his team, and it was an external pair of eyes that saw what was building.

“I discovered [that] after consulting a business journalist from the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. I didn't know where else to go, but I was reading her articles every week in the paper, so I reached out to get her counsel, and it didn't take her very long to figure out what was going on. And thanks to her, I quickly shifted, and things got better very quickly by basically removing that perception of favoritism out of the office,” Krueck said.

Krueck also credited Chas Mulcahy, a lawyer in Milwaukee, with showing him “what it meant to truly build strong business relationships and what it means to network with the right people.”

Krueck's interest in radio and telecom was born during his time in the Air Force and Wisconsin National Guard. He said his military experience played a vital role in shaping the core methods of how he leads and operates, such as discipline, structure, collaboration and commitment. Arguably the most important method of them all, though, is trust.

“There were times when I had to get on top of equipment, and my unit had a radar, and the radar broadcasted 1.2 MW of power. So when we were up working on our equipment, we had to trust my peers that they would black out a sector of the radar, so if I'm standing on a piece of equipment and I'm in between 340 degrees and 330 degrees, black out those 10 degrees. If they missed it by five degrees, I'd be sitting in a microwave oven,” he said. — Noah Ziegler

ers and peaked at 2.8 million. That's good for the third-most-watched WNBA game ever on **ABC** and is up 76% compared to last year's regular-season viewership on ABC. So far this season, WNBA coverage across **ESPN** platforms has seen a 14% improvement from the 2024 campaign.

EDO MEASURING AD IMPACT ON ViX

TelevisaUnivision is growing its partnership with **EDO** to allow the TV outcomes company to look at the consumer impact of TV ads on **ViX**. The move will help advertisers increase ROI on cross-platform campaigns through TU. According to EDO, ads on Spanish-language TV networks were 31% more effective than ads on English-language nets in 2024. ViX reaches 28 million U.S. video viewers across platforms as of May, and TU said early cross-platform outcomes on ViX indicate strong consumer engagement.

DOING GOOD

Fifteen rising college juniors are set to get \$20,000 scholarships each as part of the Spectrum Scholars program. It's the fifth class since **Charter** introduced the program in 2020, having awarded \$1.8 million in financial assistance and provided professional development opportunities for 90 students along the way. In addition to the scholarship, participants will have a chance to embark on a two-year career development program. Students will also receive mentorship from Spectrum employees, access to networking events and the chance for a paid, 10-week internship at one of the company's corporate offices.

PEOPLE

Meeri Cuniff was tapped as VP, Programming Strategy & Content Planning for **FX Networks**, **Freeform** and **Disney Entertainment's** FAST channels. She reports to **Christian Drobnyk**, EVP, Programming FX, National Geographic, Freeform & Disney Branded Television for **ABC News Group & Disney Entertainment Networks**. Cuniff previously served as SVP, Programming Strategy for **E!** **Entertainment** and **Universal Kids** and was most recently head of Content and Marketing Strategy for the **TCLtv+** streaming platform in the U.S. and Canada, where she was responsible for platform curation, launching new channels, and optimizing performance for over 400 FAST channels and an AVOD library.

EDITORS' NOTE

Cablefax will not be publishing Thursday, June 19, as our parent company **Access Intelligence** honors Juneteenth. We will not be publishing Friday, June 20, as well. Your next issue will land in inboxes Monday, June 23. Stay tuned to [Cablefax.com](https://www.cablefax.com) for any breaking news updates in the meantime, and be sure to work on submitting entries for our [Voices of Impact and Workplace Culture Awards](#) (formerly the Diversity & Pride List Awards). Standard pricing expires July 1.

Think about that for a minute...

Ten Years?

Commentary by Steve Effros

It was just two columns ago that I quoted John Malone insisting on the need to increase scale if a major telecom company was going to succeed. He proved to be right. Well, here I go again, finding it useful to quote John about gaining a more realistic perspective on unknowns, and what might be needed.

This time it's about governmental and regulatory sooth-saying. I was the recipient of one of his exclamations many years ago when I was involved in drafting the original federal rules on cable television franchises. We put in benchmarks and restrictions for seven- and 15-year local franchise terms nationwide. Malone was aghast. He pointed out that with an industry moving as fast as cable was at the time, there was no way the companies themselves could develop business plans that could reliably anticipate what was going to happen or what changes were needed that far into the future.

He wasn't insisting that there be no regulation, or that franchises be for much longer periods, he was arguing that overly detailed franchise terms had to be written very flexibly to account for the fact that no one, the business folks or the politicians and regulators could possibly guess where and how the industry would develop. That, he said, was hubris.

So here we are today, and one of the burning political and regulatory issues is what we should do with AI. There are those who argue that we have to allow it to be developed, essentially, without any regulation. That putting any restrictions on its development will seriously hamper the "race" we are engaged in with the Chinese for dominance in this new ecosystem. Others argue that we have no idea how dangerous unfettered AI might be and we need to be very cautious about developing technology when we admittedly don't even know how it actually works.

I'm going to do something here that I rarely do in this column. I'm suggesting for those of you who really want to get your head around this issue [read a relatively short Axios](#)

[piece](#) that was written last week on all of this. It was titled "Behind the Curtain; What If They're Right?"

Now I'm not going to get into a debate here about whether AI is a potential savior or existential risk for society. It could be both, and there are very smart folks on both sides of the issue. But one thing I know, and Dr. John made very clear: it's total hubris, either way, for the government to now be declaring, in effect, a moratorium on the regulation of AI for the next 10 years. We don't know what AI will or will not bring in a year or two, let alone ten!

Yet Congress is debating a bill right now that has, effectively, deep in its 1000-page details, a federal "freeze" on regulation other than might someday come out of Congress itself, regarding AI safeguards. In other words, no other American regulatory body, particularly the states, would be free to adopt any restrictive rules regarding AI. Ten years. That's nuts. Why? Because we know that Congress is non-functional now, and the FCC and FTC are also being neutered by both Court decisions and even the absence of full, balanced membership.

Please understand. I'm not saying we should stop the development of AI, I'm not suggesting that I know what regulations should apply. But I do know there's reasonable, current concern, and to set up a situation where neither the states nor the federal government could seriously and expeditiously

look at what might be needed, soon, is a really bad idea. Frankly, it might be too late to create meaningful safeguards already. But 10 years?



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(Steve Effros was President of CATA for 23 years and is now an advisor and consultant to the cable industry. His views do not necessarily reflect the views of Cablefax.)

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