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WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Open Borders: SCTE TechExpo Widens its Reach

There has been an ongoing effort to make **SCTE TechExpo** more of a gathering spot for the entire industry, with the annual conference set to take its biggest step toward that goal this fall. For the first time ever, the show (Sept. 29-Oct. 1 in D.C.) will feature a "StreamTech" track focusing on streaming issues such as low latency, next-gen cloud delivery and real-time streaming for predictive scaling.

To create the streaming sessions, SCTE organizers are partnering with the **Streaming Video Technology Alliance**, whose members include **Akamai, Amazon, MLB, Netflix** and **Twitch**. The lineup is still coming together, but SVTA member **NASA** is slated to speak about its free, ad-free streaming service, which includes livestreams of current space missions. SVTA members also include **Comcast, Charter, Liberty Global** and other SCTE members, but the streaming sides of those businesses haven't typically been a part of the show.

"What we're doing going forward is aligning ourselves with strategic partnerships and associations. One of our most downloaded standards is SCTE 35, which is digital ad insertion. It's often at other shows and profiled at the **NAB Show**, for example, by **Google** and **YouTube**. But we weren't actually highlighting it at our own show," SCTE CEO *Maria Popo* told **CFX**. "So, there's this theme where SVTA is the start, and then looking at other possible opportunities, for example, on the fiber side in the future."

In other words, Expo isn't just "The DOCSIS Show." There are already a few fiber players—**C Spire** and **Google Fiber**—joining this year's event, and SCTE hopes to grow that base. SCTE differs from its parent organization **CableLabs** in that it's for everyone, not just cable operators. "It's an open community. As we see convergence, it's important for us to recognize that and know that everybody's evolving. Not only are operators evolving, vendors are evolving, and so are associations. We're finding productive, meaningful ways to engage with each other," said Popo.

Proof of a more inclusive SCTE can be seen with its board, which for the first time includes a contractor—**MasTec Group** President *Rick Suarez*. MasTec is a major contractor for broadband and wireless networks, with extensive experience in trenching and fiber optic network installation.

Another big change for this year's Expo is that instead of 75+ technical papers presented at the show, there will be just 12. "We wanted different formats because everybody consumes content differently to learn or get that spark of inspiration. This year, we have accepted panels, interviews, master classes, workshops, and so we have a nice mix of everything on the agenda. It also opened up the opportunity for vendors to bring in their customers and talk about case studies, whereas with a technical paper, you wouldn't really be able to do that," said *Janelle Morse*, SCTE's VP of Conferences. "Technical papers still have a home at TechExpo, but they're more future-thinking. It has to be something that is not out being processed and



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done right now. It's one to three years in the future."

Of course, with the show taking place in Washington, D.C., there's going to be plenty of talk about the new administration's stance on various issues. Expo's Tech Policy track will be back to dissect it all, plus there's hope that a lot of lawmakers and their staffers will attend. It's not just happenstance that Expo will be in the nation's capital this year, with organizers planning on holding the show in D.C. in inauguration years going forward.

CableLab and **NCTA** are working on demos to showcase to government officials how connectivity benefits the population. While *Mark Bell*, NCTA's SVP of Creative Services, is retiring later this year, he's got his fingerprints all over a 10,000 square foot exhibition space on Expo's floor to tell technology's story. That should be pretty exciting given the evolution of NCTA's "Broadband Home" over the years at its former Cable Show/INTX under Bell.

"Two years ago, they started the tech policy track in Denver. It was leading up to us to get to D.C. and have a big splash there being right in the hometown of Congress and getting them to attend the event, and yes, talk about policy and regulation, but more importantly, to be able to see what connectivity does for the country," said Morse.

COMCAST MAKES QCI 8 SHIFT

Comcast is upgrading many of its Xfinity Mobile, **Comcast Business Mobile** and NOW Mobile subscribers to data plans using QCI 8, a Quality of Service metric that indicates a level of priority and resource allocation for network traffic. The migration will bring increased speeds and lower latency for folks, in addition to improved performance in high-traffic areas. Customers will only need to restart their phone or toggle airplane mode on and off to activate prioritized data. Impacted customers should be notified about the change by July 1.

PARAMOUNT+ GOES PREMIUM

Paramount+ with Showtime is no more, or at least the name is being ditched on the SVOD. After Paramount+ [combined with Showtime in June 2023](#) to create the Paramount+ with Showtime plan, the streamer is renaming its ad-free tier to Paramount+ Premium. It'll remain at the same price point of \$12.99/month or \$119.99/year, and the linear network will stick with the Paramount+ with Showtime moniker. "Since we recently introduced a sampling of Showtime programming to the Essential plan, the Premium plan name reflects the broad and diverse offerings across both plan tiers. Showtime programming remains an important part of Paramount+, and

is still prominently represented on the service," Paramount+ wrote in a notice online. No changes will be made to plan benefits.

VERIZON UNVEILS CHANGES TO HELP CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Verizon introduced a litany of customer-centric enhancements across support, digital services and retail Tuesday. The mobile giant is offering customers the chance to interact with a new "Customer Champion," a dedicated expert who uses Google Cloud's AI to resolve various issues. The goal of the Customer Champion is for users to only need to call once, before being kept in the loop via the My Verizon app, text or call backs. Speaking of the My Verizon app, it's getting an AI-fueled refresh that makes it easier for users to get more info on upgrading devices, adding new lines as well as other general questions. Verizon is also expanding customer support call hours with live agents and rolling out new 24/7 live chat support. To celebrate the changes, Verizon is releasing 35,000 free prizes via Verizon Access. Customers will be able to score tickets to concerts including *Beyonce*, *Katy Perry* and *Lady Gaga*, as well as gift cards and merchandise from brands like **Amazon** and **Disney**. Those will be available through Monday.

KUIPER 2 LAUNCHES

A second batch of satellites from **Amazon's** Project Kuiper is now in low Earth orbit. Kuiper 2 successfully launched from Cape Canaveral on Monday, delivering an additional 27 satellites as part of Amazon's bid to provide satellite broadband and compete with **SpaceX's Starlink**. Project Kuiper will eventually have 3,236 total satellites in orbit, though **FCC** requirements mean it has to launch the first half of that constellation by July 2026. No word yet on when Kuiper 3 will be scheduled.

ASTOUND WANTS TO MIX & MATCH

Astound is introducing new Mix & Match Mobile Plans for its customers in an effort to offer more flexibility. Customers can now assign different data plans to different users on the same account. Each line's plan can be changed at any time, with everything remaining on one bill. Astound's mobile data plans include 1.5 GB options for \$15/month in addition to an internet plan, 3 GB for \$25/month, Unlimited for \$30/month and Unlimited Plus for \$50/month.

CARRIAGE

QVC and **HSN**'s linear channels are now live on **Philo**. They're the first live shopping channel to be added to the service, which has approximately 1.3 million paid subscribers. **QVC** and **HSN** will be available on Philo's core subscription-based service, as well as through its **FAST** channel offering. – **Allen Media Group's Local Now** platform added 23 channels from **Warner Bros. Discovery**, spanning genres including news, sports and entertainment, as well as some Spanish-language offerings. **CNN Headlines** and **CNN Originals** were among those added, along with its counterpart **CNN Xpress**. **Paws & Claws**, **Crime Scenes**, **Family Unscripted**, **MotorTrend FAST** and **TuDiscovery de WBTV** were also part of Local Now's new batch of offerings. – This fall, indie studio Wonder Project, which produces faith-based films and TV series, will launch a new subscription service exclusively on **Prime Video** in the U.S. Subs will get early access to new original programming as well as a curated library of movies and shows. The second season of Biblical drama series "House of David" will exclusively premiere alongside the launch of the new subscription service, then on Prime Video at a later date. Customers can subscribe to Wonder Project for \$8.99/month.

FIBER FRENZY

Shentel is set to enter the Blacksburg, Virginia, market after striking a deal to acquire the assets and operations of **Blacksburg Broadband LLC**, which operates under the name **WideOpen Blacksburg**. The transaction is expected to wrap up by early to mid-July. – **Metronet** is bringing its residential fiber network online in Kokomo, Indiana. The first homes to go online can now access symmetrical speeds of up to 5 Gigs, while business customers can get up to 10 Gig internet. The ISP, which already services over 40 cities in the state, will continue to expand the network to more homes in Kokomo on a rolling basis.

RATINGS

The news networks had many people tuning in as the conflict in the Middle East continued to ramp up. **Fox News'** breaking news coverage of the U.S. strike on Iran's nuclear facilities Saturday garnered 4.94 million viewers P2+ and 898,000 A25-54 in primetime. **CNN** checked in with 1.81 million (495,000 A25-54) while **MSNBC** had 1.18 million (175,000 A25-54). **ABC** led broadcast nets with 2.35 million (523,000 A25-54). For the week, Fox News swept the primetime and total-day categories, posting 3.43 million and 1 million viewers P2+, respectively. – Sunday's Fever vs Aces game became **ESPN's** third-most-watched **WNBA** game ever with 1.7 million average viewers, peaking at 2.2 million. That's up 52% from last year's WNBA on ESPN regular-season average. "WNBA Countdown" led into the game with 443,000 viewers as well—up 33% compared to the show's average in 2024.

PROGRAMMING

Actor and comedian *Shane Gillis* will host this year's ESPYS. The event, scheduled for July 16 at 8pm, will take place at The Dolby Theatre in L.A. and air on **ABC**. **ESPN+** will have it available to stream, with an on-demand replay becoming available the following day on **Disney+**, **Hulu** and **ESPN+**. – More news from **NBC Sports** as it shapes up its **NBA** crew. *Maria Taylor* was named the lead NBA studio host, helming NBCS' studio programs on Sunday and Tuesday nights. Additionally, Taylor will host select **WNBA** games on **NBC** and **Peacock** come 2026. Joining Taylor will be Hall of Famer *Grant Hill*, who's joining as a game analyst. Hill has helped call the past 10 Final Fours as part of **TNT Sports** and **CBS Sports'** March Madness coverage. – Home experts *Scott McGillivray* and *Bryan Baeumler* are returning for Season 2 of "Renovation Resort Showdown" next month. The show returns July 22 at 9pm on **HGTV**. – Two-part **HBO** documentary "Billy Joel: And So It Goes" promises a deep dive into the "love, loss and personal struggles" that have fueled the Piano Man's greatest works over decades. Part one airs on July 18 at 8pm, followed by part two on July 25. It will also be available to stream on **HBO Max**. – Award-winning kids' show "Stillwater" will return for Season 4 on Aug. 1 on **Apple TV+**.

PEOPLE

Alan Davidson has found his next gig following his three-year stint as **NTIA's** Administrator. He's joining **Databricks**, a data and AI company founded in 2013, to become its Head of Government Affairs and help build out the company's public policy function. "As someone who has focused much of my career on promoting open and trusted technology, I'm thrilled to be joining a company with its roots in open source standards and with a mission to democratize data and AI," Davidson wrote on LinkedIn.

CFX'S 'THE DOWNLOAD' NOW AVAILABLE ON VIDEO

Cablefax is proud to launch the first-ever video edition of "The Download," our special report series that takes you inside the biggest ideas shaping broadband and cable today. In this new video era of The Download, you can expect deep dives into emerging trends, expert insights from CFX editors as well as special guests and, most importantly, fresh perspectives on all the major issues driving change in the industry right now. Our inaugural episode not only features a breakdown of the [Charter-Cox merger](#) but also the must-know details concerning the launch of **ESPN's** new [DTC streaming product](#). Plus, we introduce the newest voice in the CFX brain trust: Senior Editor [John Saavedra](#), who brings over a decade of media coverage experience to the team. Want future episodes of The Download delivered straight to your inbox? You can subscribe [here](#).