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WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Countdown to SLC: What's on Tap for The Independent Show 2025?

After **NCTC** and **ACA Connects** sang together in Nashville last summer, the two are headed to Salt Lake City soon to host the 20th edition of **The Independent Show** (Aug. 10-13). While the landscape has shifted considerably in the 12 months since TIS24, there will be familiar talking points as attendees continue to explore how their companies can gain an edge amid a heated, competitive market.

Last year, mobile and AI were front and center throughout the show, and this year won't be different. Those two topics will be accompanied by plenty of deliberation about where companies stand with video, broadband innovation, a shifting regulatory environment, federal funding initiatives and more. With NCTC and ACAC having around 700 and 500 members, respectively, there will be a broad spectrum of perspectives and experiences that folks bring to conversations.

"I think our focus this year is more about strategic growth, not just growth in general," NCTC CEO *Lou Borrelli* told **CFX**, noting how the industry has had an aura of uncertainty around it that's hindered some in growth and innovation. "We are dealing with that from a standpoint of, how do you continue to create opportunities for members that you know are where they need to be, or where they need to head, and then overcome the fact that, 'Well, we haven't gotten BEAD money yet,' or 'We've had issues. Interest rates are still high.'"

With mobile, Borrelli said one of his priorities for this year

is spreading the word that the co-op offers "a program that is about as light [of] a lift as a member could get, relative to what it takes to launch a mobile service." Over a dozen companies have already launched mobile through NCTC's MVNO partnerships, including **TVS Cable**, **Breezeline** and **TDS**, but "dozens more" are currently onboarding or at least weighing if the MVNO is a good fit at the moment.

However, Borrelli understands there's still reluctance by some because mobile hasn't been part of their core business up until this point. "Unless you came out of the telco side, which a lot of our members have, you look at mobile and you think, 'Oh my gosh, this is not my core business.' Well, I would argue it's absolutely a core business, because it's an extension of your broadband connectivity," he said. "For me, it's making sure that people understand what it takes to launch all of the resources that we've developed and pulled together to support them in that and that they've got a great platform with a good network partner to work from."

Another resource NCTC offers is Broadband TV. Borrelli hopes more will adopt and bundle the OTT video solution. NCTC is currently in the developmental process with its AI-related initiatives, but the expectation is "that should be a fully baked, launched and successful project" by the time TIS26 rolls around.

On the regulatory front of TIS25, ACAC has monitored quite a lot of changes since last year's show. With a new president, **FCC** chair, **NTIA** administrator and endless other leadership




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transitions, the realignment has been felt by operators across the U.S., for better or worse. As BEAD changes, deregulation efforts and USF reform hover over D.C., ACAC President/CEO *Grant Spellmeyer* is focused on keeping members informed with an open dialogue.

"I came into 2025 with four key policy goals: fixing Title II rate regulation, fixing permitting, fixing state rate regulation and fixing the BEAD program," Spellmeyer said. "We've checked the box on Title II. I think by the end of the year, we will have checked the box on BEAD, and that leaves permitting reform and state rate regulation ... I expect at The Independent Show you'll hear us talk about all four of those and what we can do to drive the other two home."

The array of keynotes, panels and sessions at TIS25 will expand on the topics Borrelli and Spellmeyer are concentrating on. Economic forecaster and former **CNBC** Chief Economist/co-host of "Squawk Box" *Marci Rossell* will help open the show with a keynote titled "Climbing the Economic Curve—What Convergence Means for Broadband's Future." Immediately following that is a panel on how inflation, interest rates and consumer behavior have shaped the way financial leaders are approaching the current climate.

Vamsi Duvvuri, Partner, Americas AI Telecom Group for **EY**, will highlight AI trends in broadband during a separate keynote. That might be intriguing for members since Borrelli credited Duvvuri as being "instrumental" to the development of NCTC's AI Center of Excellence. Closing out TIS25 will be **MoffettNathanson's** *Craig Moffett* and media expert *Evan Shapiro* exploring the future of media and telecom.

ANOTHER FCC-COMCAST INQUIRY

The watching eye of the **FCC** continues to focus on **Comcast NBCUniversal**. On Tuesday, Chairman *Brendan Carr* wrote a letter to Comcast CEO *Brian Roberts* to inform him that the Commission was opening an inquiry into Comcast and NBCU's relationships with local broadcast TV affiliates. "We have received an inquiry from the FCC and will cooperate with them to answer their questions. We are proud that for many decades we have supported local broadcast TV stations with world-class sports and entertainment, enabling them to drive viewership in a media environment that has grown increasingly competitive," a Comcast NBCU spokesperson said in a statement to **CFX**. In the letter, which **Newsmax** first [reported](#), Carr said he directed the Media Bureau to review whether Comcast has been in compliance with FCC regulations during network or affiliate negotiations, as well as whether it has violated the public interest standard. He referenced a "clear tension"

that's developed between local broadcast stations and national programmers, which has been taken up a notch as companies distribute more content on streaming platforms. "I have heard numerous reports that the approach that NBC and other similarly situated networks are taking in recent negotiations is an attempt to extract onerous financial and operational concessions from local broadcast TV stations," Carr wrote, also noting, "These practices suggest that the relationships between programming networks and their affiliates are not operating in the manner envisioned by FCC regulations." Carr is concerned about reported restrictions being placed regarding carriage on streaming platforms—including vMVPDs—and provisions that hinder a local station's ability to bid for local sports rights. "Not only does this raise localism concerns under the FCC's statutory public interest standard, but it calls into question the extent to which some national programming networks are able to influence station operations," he said. Carr ordered the Media Bureau to acquire copies of affiliation agreements that Comcast or NBC/**Telemundo** has entered with local stations. It's the second time the FCC has launched an inquiry into Comcast since Carr assumed the chairman's seat, though the first one [pertained](#) to the company's DEI policies. We'll be tuning in to see if Roberts or other Comcast execs address the probe during the company's Q25 earnings call Thursday morning.

GROUPS THROW SUPPORT BEHIND BROADBAND VANDALISM BILL

More calls are coming in for Congress to take action against telecommunications theft and vandalism. After **Charter** ramped up the pressure earlier this month by classifying an attack as [domestic terrorism](#), four associations penned a letter to the **Department of Homeland Security** and the **FBI**, urging Congress and the *Trump* administration to support the "Stopping the Theft and Destruction of Broadband Act of 2025." **NCTA**, **ACA Connects**, **NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association** and **USTelecom** were the trade groups that signed the letter. The legislation was introduced by Rep. *Laurel Lee* (R-FL) in April and is sponsored by Rep. *Marc Veasey* (D-TX). It would change Title 18 of the U.S. Code to make it so that attacks on networks come with harsh federal penalties. "Administration support of such legislation would underscore the government's commitment to safeguarding the physical security of critical assets and to prosecuting those who seek to sow economic and social upheaval by attacking the networks upon which so many consumers and businesses rely," the letter read. The associations applauded the government's

recent assistance with broadband vandalism, and encouraged it to allocate additional resources for high-risk areas while expanding intelligence-sharing initiatives across federal, state and local entities. Additionally, it recommends leaders “treat these infrastructure attacks as domestic terrorism when the facts warrant.”

SCHURZ'S NEW FIBER GROUP

Schurz Communications announced the formation of **Schurz Broadband Group** (SBG), a new division that will “unify and amplify the strengths” of its regional fiber-based internet providers, including **Antietam Broadband** in Maryland, **Burlington Telecom** in Vermont, **Hiawatha Broadband** in Minnesota, **Long Lines Broadband** in Iowa, Nebraska and South Dakota, **NKTelco** in Ohio and **Orbitel Communications** in Arizona, “under one mission-driven broadband organization.” The company says each provider will continue to operate independently and under its own brand name, “while gaining access to shared strategic resources and technology leadership through SBG.” That leadership will include *Diego Anderson* as SBG President, *Jim Kronebusch* as CTO and *Sheryl Rosen* as CMO. The goal of the new group is to “advance innovation, fiber expansion and digital access” while retaining each provider’s local leadership and brand identity. “We are excited to be bringing our regional companies together in a new way—while also preserving what makes them special: being local, creating new opportunities to grow, innovate and deliver an exceptional customer experience,” Anderson said in a statement.

SPECTRUM STREAMING FEATURES

Charter is rolling out new digital self-service features that allow Spectrum TV and Internet customers to more easily add and upgrade streaming subscriptions. Spectrum Select TV customers whose plans include free access to streaming services with ads can now upgrade to ad-free tiers through the My Spectrum App or Spectrum.net by paying only the price difference between the ad-supported and no ads tiers, which ranges from \$3 to \$10/month, depending on the app. Internet-only customers can also use these new features to add streaming apps to their plan a la carte.

DOING GOOD

Nexstar’s broadcast stations helped raise nearly \$1.4 million to assist the victims of flooding in Central Texas in July. Stations in San Angelo, Abilene and Austin, Texas led fundraising drives, including a one-hour flood relief telethon on July 10 that aired on KLST-TV in San Angelo and KTAB-TV in Abilene. Meanwhile, KXAN-TV aired PSAs signal boosting different relief orgs and directed viewers to 10 charitable entities assisting affected residents. The Nexstar Media Charitable Foundation also donated \$25,000 to The San Angela Area Foundation and The Community Foundation of the Texas Hill Country, two orgs assisting with relief efforts in Tom Green County, Kerr County and surrounding areas.

What We're Listening to

CTAM's Think Out Loud with BritBox's CMO

We're unabashed fans of CTAM's “Thinking Out Loud” podcast, which features marketing association CEO Vicki Lins interviewing some of media's top innovators to uncover how they tick. The latest episode features BritBox CMO Diana Pessin, who many may recognize from her more than 18 years at HBO, most recently as SVP of Media Strategy, Audience and Marketing Analytics.



Pessin joined BritBox in 2023 and was elevated last year to the CMO. The SVOD has about 4 million subscribers and serves up content from top UK producers and broadcasters to audiences in the U.S., Australia and the Nordic countries. In other words, it's a much more niche service than HBO and she's just fine with that.

“BritBox has been a profitable streamer for some time now, and up until recently, that wasn't the goal of many of the larger mass streamers,” Pessin said during the half-hour episode. “We're not trying to be everything to everyone. We're not necessarily going to be something for every single person in your household the way the mass players are. We like to refer ourselves as the must-have complement.”

Of course, with streamers on a constant quest to fill their content pipeline, there's a growing amount of British content on some of the bigger players. But if anything, Pessin believes that actually helps BritBox, which is owned by BBC Studios. “It's opening the eyes to consumers that this is actually something that might be interesting to them,” she said, noting that initially BritBox's main audience leaned toward expats or anglophiles already very familiar with some of the content. “For us to really grow beyond that sort of core, we need to reach the people that might not think that they actually love British content. They don't self-identify that way. So, a lot of it is opening the aperture and dimensionalizing what's so special about British content.”

The upshot of that is a campaign that launched in mid-April dubbed “See It Differently,” which taps on the notion that there's something surprisingly different about British content. BritBox is hoping “Outrageous,” which debuted late last month, will help bring in some of those new viewers. The original series explores the lives of the Mitford sisters, an aristocratic British family with six headstrong women who made (often scandalous) headlines around the world. “It's not only dimensionalizing what British is, but it's also erasing some of the misconceptions that British is only about Royals or it's only for people who like to drink tea,” Pessin says. “It's a modern take on a period story, which I think in some ways is how we're trying to position the brand.”

- Amy Maclean