

# Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

## Power Plays: Cable Linear Viewpoint as Paramount-WBD Talk Spikes

As the great linear network splinter looms, we thought new findings from **Erdos Media Research's** 2025 Basic Cable Network Study were illuminating. Then a [WSJ report](#) emerged Thursday that **Paramount-Skydance** is prepping a majority cash bid for **Warner Bros. Discovery** and they got even more interesting. Shares of WBD closed up 29% for the days, while Paramount Skydance rose 15.5%.

An Erdos chart, shared exclusively with **CFX**, showed the five favorite channels among a national representative sample of 1,500 adults 18+, with 55 nets evaluated. No surprise to see **ESPN** rank first with 33% naming it as a fave, but it's notable **Food Network** (20%) and **CNN** (19%) ranked second and third. Just this week, WBD chief *David Zaslav* [identified](#) both brands as top priorities following the separation of linear and streaming at the company. Figuring out the right approach for Food and CNN has been an ongoing project. Recall the Food Network Kitchen subscription app that debuted in 2019 at \$6.99/month then quietly switched to free before being folded into FoodNetwork.com in 2024. And of course, who can forget the shuttering of **CNN+** in 2022, just one month after launch and weeks after the Discovery-WBD merger was complete.

A new CNN streaming service is set to debut this fall—with pay TV customers to receive it through authentication. That's a key difference from CNN+'s launch and a sign of the current video model that's evolving with more of a hybrid approach

(see **Charter**, **DirecTV** and **Verizon's** deals for authentication of ESPN's DTC offering). Food Network continues to be a gold standard brand, but it has a lot of competition in the way of FAST channels and the internet at large.

Finishing fourth in Erdos' survey was Fox News, the linear ratings leader that is now part of the new \$19.99/month **Fox One** bundle (also available to pay TV on an authenticated basis).

Rounding out the top five is Paramount Skydance-owned **Comedy Central** (no **NBCUniversal** or soon-to-be **Versant** brands made the cut). The company's new leadership has said it has no plans to spin off linear. Instead, Paramount's looking at the cable networks as iconic brands that need to be redefined. It's way too early to speculate on the odds of some sort of WBD-Paramount combo, but it's still fun to imagine a "PAW Patrol" cooking show for families or what a **CBS News-CNN** combo could look like.

The separation of the WBD linear nets has long fueled speculation of linear M&A. But the WSJ reports Paramount-Skydance wants the entire company and is trying to swoop in pre-split to stave off a bidding war for studios and streaming that could include **Amazon** and **Apple**. Sure, that'd be nice... but would Ellison be willing to take just the cable slice to beef up the vision of a reimagined Paramount-**Pluto** streamer?

"The good news for WBD and its shareholders is that there are a number of different potential dance partners for either the whole company or its valuable pieces that could still lead to some competition for PSKY," a MoffettNathanson note declared,

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speculating that **Comcast** or private equity could be interested.

The guessing games will continue as everyone is trying to get bigger these days (see Charter-**Cox** and **Nexstar-TEGNA**). Erdos Media Research, which was formed by combining Beta Research and Erdos & Morgan, found adults subscribe to 4.7 streaming services on average, with 37% receiving at least one streaming service as a perk through another purchase or subscription. The study also looked at traditional cable and satellite TV, finding **Comcast/Xfinity** (28%) and Charter/Spectrum (24%) led among live TV service providers, but **Hulu + Live TV** (19%) and **YouTube TV** (17%) weren't far behind. Of note—cable and satellite providers still dominate in longevity. Subscribers have been with Comcast for an average of 4.9 years, and Charter for 4.8 years, compared to newer platforms like YouTube TV (2.6 years) and Hulu + Live TV (2.4 years).

## CARR REPEATS PARAMOUNT VERSE

With *David Ellison* in the news for a potential **Warner Bros. Discovery** bid, we're still dealing with the fallout from the **Paramount-Skydance** transaction. It's safe to say if this deal moves beyond the talk phase, there's going to be plenty of lawmakers weighing in. California Senator *Adam Schiff* is among the Democrats who have asked FCC Chair *Brendan Carr* to provide more details on the agency's approval of Paramount-Skydance. Carr's response from last month went public on the **FCC's** website today. He pretty much word-for-word [repeated his response](#) on Aug. 12 to Sen. *Dick Blumenthal* (D-CT), writing that the review was standard procedure for the FCC and reiterating a pledge to give all parties in front of the FCC a "fair shake and even-handed treatment." As with the Blumenthal letter, he didn't address Paramount's "60 Minutes" settlement with *Donald Trump*.

## GOP SENS: HANDS OFF CBRS, 6GHZ

A group of 10 Senate Republicans, including *Jerry Moran* (KS) and *Cynthia Lummis* (WY), are urging the **FCC** "to standby its previous spectrum decisions, commitments and allocations and avoid disruption to existing uses of spectrum." In a letter sent to FCC Chair *Brendan Carr*, they specifically call for ensuring that existing operations in the 3.55-3.70 GHz band (CBRS band) and in the 6 GHz band for unlicensed uses can continue operating without disruption. "Rural broadband providers, including many that are small or family owned, have made substantial investments in equipment and services centered around the use of CBRS spectrum after these providers lawfully obtained authority and licenses from the FCC," they wrote. "Repurposing CBRS licenses now, or changing the technical terms of existing licenses, would upend the

significant investments made in CBRS to date and leave many rural communities who rely on CBRS for broadband connectivity in the dark." They said it's a similar story for 6 GHz, noting that decisions for both bands were approved by the FCC during the first Trump administration: "The FCC must honor its prior spectrum decisions and safeguard the existing uses in these bands."

## NETFLIX, AMC NETWORKS EXPAND LICENSING DEAL

**AMC Networks** is expanding its content licensing deal with **Netflix**, adding more of its original series to the streaming service. There's good reason. **AMC** shows available on Netflix generated 210 million global views between 2H24 and 1H25. Meanwhile, **AMC+** saw boosts to both subscriber acquisition and viewership for its most important franchise series after prior seasons were added to Netflix in the U.S. For example, after the first two seasons of "Dark Winds" were added to Netflix, AMC saw a nearly 600% increase in "first stream activity" (the first piece of content a viewer watches after subscribing to AMC+) for the third season of Dark Winds. The show also saw a 400% increase in viewership vs pre-Netflix. "The Walking Dead: Dead City" Season 2 saw an over 700% increase in first streams after the first season hit Netflix and a nearly 1,000% increase in viewership. The new pact includes new seasons of current franchise titles: "Interview with the Vampire" Season 2, available Sept. 30 on the streamer, along with Dark Winds Season 3 and the second seasons of "The Walking Dead: Daryl Dixon," which will be added in October. The Walking Dead: Dead City and "Mayfair Witches" will hit Netflix at a later date, with the upcoming Anne Rice series "Talamasca: The Secret Order" making its way to the SVOD in 2026. More AMC library content is also joining Netflix. Offerings include "Orphan Black" and its spinoff "Orphan Black: Echoes," "Par-ish," "NOS4A2," "This Is Going to Hurt" and "Soulmates." The deal also extends internationally, with forthcoming seasons of series that are currently in production and have not yet aired in the U.S. streaming via Netflix in select markets.

## PRIME DIVES DEEPER INTO AI FOR THURSDAY NIGHT FOOTBALL

It's almost time to begin **Prime Video's** fourth season of streaming the **NFL's** Thursday Night Football games with the **Commanders-Packers** facing off tonight at 8:15pm. This year will continue to see **Amazon** roll out AI-powered features throughout the season, but they'll each be tested during a "Prime Vision with Next Gen Stats" alternative stream that Prime Video said will serve as "a

laboratory and incubator for new features that may eventually advance to the main feed." New features to come this year include "Pocket Health," which uses a proprietary AI model to analyze data points across the offensive line and indicate a quarterback's threat of being sacked. There will also be an "End of game Suite" of insights that predict remaining possessions, analyze time-constrained scenarios and identify the amount of time needed before a team can enter victory formation. Existing features, including Defensive Alerts, Coverage ID, Field Goal Target Zones and Rapid Recap, will be on display this season as well.

#### NIelsen, WBD RENEW

Nielsen has been taking heat from [programmers](#) and the NFL itself, but the ratings firm can celebrate a win after signing a long-term extension with Warner Bros. Discovery. The renewal, effective immediately, includes measurement of all WBD's linear and streaming properties. The partnership will expand to include Nielsen's Advanced Audience insights, and WBD will continue to utilize the Big Data + Panel as currency for upfronts.

#### ONLINE TRAINING WITH SCTE

SCTE is looking to welcome the next generation of the broadband workforce, and it's teaming up with Colorado State University Global to introduce more flexible ways to develop skills. The two created a Broadband Operations Management Certificate, a fully online and asynchronous program that also offers a hands-on work-based experience course. The program focuses on areas such as fiber optics, directional drilling, utility safety and leadership skills. SCTE members can receive special tuition rates in addition to academic credit for select SCTE certifications and courses.

#### NETFLIX, AMAZON AD PARTNERSHIP

Amazon Ads and Netflix announced a partnership that will allow advertisers using Amazon's DSP to access the streamer's premium inventory. The new offering will launch in 4Q25 in the U.S., U.K., France, Spain, Mexico, Canada, Japan, Brazil, Italy, Germany and Australia.

#### RATINGS

"Task," the newest HBO crime drama, is off to a promising start, with Sunday's premiere attracting 3.1 million U.S. viewers across HBO and HBO Max in its first three days. That's up 26% compared to the premiere of "Mare of Easttown," creator Brad Ingelsby's previous crime

drama on the network. The first episode of Task is now also among the top five premieres in HBO Max history. – The return of football also means seasonal adjustments in weekly cable network ratings. ESPN took the primetime crown for Sept. 1-7 after finishing with 2.33 million viewers P2+. Fox News came second with 1.98 million, though its weekday primetime number was in the 2.3 million range. MSNBC trailed with 666,000 as did HGTV with 625,000, while ESPN2 enjoyed more college football and cracked the top five with 451,000. In total day, Fox News and ESPN traded places with 1.29 million and 999,000, respectively, followed by MSNBC (466,000), CNN (366,000) and HGTV (329,000). ESPN got help from "College Game-Day" reeling in 2.6 million viewers Saturday, which led into an Illinois win over Duke that had 2.2 million tune in. – NBC and Peacock teamed up to post a total audience delivery of 24.7 million viewers for Sunday night's dramatic Bills win over the Ravens. That's fewer than the 28.3 million who tuned into Thursday's Cowboys-Eagles game, but NBC Sports still averaged 26.5 million across the two telecasts, good for its best two-game NFL opening weekend since 2015. Peacock saw an average minute audience of 3 million for the Ravens-Bills game, becoming NBC's most-streamed Sunday night NFL game on record.

#### CARRIAGE

NBCUniversal launched a "Law & Order" FAST channel. The free channel will air 141 episodes that comprise Seasons 5 through 10. Users can tune in now on The Roku Channel, Pluto TV, Prime Video, LG Channels, Samsung TV Plus and Xumo Play.

#### FIBER FRENZY

Looks like the Great Plains is growing a little bit eastward. Great Plains Communications unveiled the expansion of its fiber network into Kentucky with the completion of a 165-mile network. Businesses, wholesale customers, wireless carriers and hyperscalers will have access to GPC's enterprise offerings that range in speed from 1 Gbps to 400 Gbps. GPC Fiber will be available in markets including Lexington, Frankfort, Jeffersonton, Simpsonville, Shelbyville, Bridgeport, Georgetown and Versailles. – Tillman Fiber announced a \$100 million infrastructure project to build an open-access fiber network in Miami-Dade County, Florida. Construction began in June and will be completed in phases.

BASIC CABLE P2+ PRIME RANKINGS* (09/01/25-09/07/25)		
MON-SUN	MC US AA%	MC US AA (000)
ESPN	0.783	2521
FNC	0.603	1942
MSNBC	0.204	656
HGTV	0.193	621
CNN	0.139	447
HALL	0.124	398
USA	0.119	384
TLC	0.115	371
TBS	0.110	352
INSP	0.106	342
FOOD	0.100	322
TVLAND	0.096	308
GSN	0.095	305
DISC	0.092	297
HIST	0.088	282
LIFE	0.086	277
ID	0.081	261
HALLMYST	0.074	240
FX	0.071	230
MTV	0.068	219
A&E	0.066	212
PRMNT	0.065	211
OXY	0.065	210
WETV	0.059	190
NWSMX	0.055	178
TNT	0.054	174
AMC	0.054	174
BRAVO	0.052	168
NAN	0.050	159
ADSM	0.049	157
NFL	0.047	151
MLB	0.046	148
BET	0.045	144
NATGEO	0.044	143
LMN	0.043	139
SYFY	0.042	136
COM	0.042	135
ESPN2	0.040	129
TRAVEL	0.039	124
REELZ	0.038	123
APL	0.037	120
SUND	0.037	118
MAGN	0.036	117
IFC	0.036	116
FETV	0.036	115
HLN	0.035	114
DSNY	0.031	101

\*P2+ L+SD rankers are based on national Nielsen numbers, not coverage.