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WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

News FAST: Free Channels Rising as Cordless News Destination

Eyes were glued to news nets last week after two fatal shootings on school campuses rocked the country. News channels had wall-to-wall coverage from Wednesday afternoon of both the Evergreen High School shooting in Colorado as well as the assassination of conservative activist *Charlie Kirk*, who was speaking to a large crowd at Utah Valley University when he was fatally wounded. Coverage continued into Thursday and Friday as the cases developed, including the arrest of a suspect in the Kirk killing.

Cable news networks saw ratings boosts last week as these major breaking news events continued to command viewer attention for days after they broke. **Nielsen**'s Big Data + Panel ratings for the week of Sept. 8-14 saw **Fox News** continue to lead the cable news pack, averaging 3.06 million P2+ viewers in prime, a big jump from last week's 1.98 million. **MSNBC** averaged 867,000 in prime, up from 666,000 last week, while CNN's average of 615,000 viewers made it the fourth most-watched ad-supported cable net of the week (**ESPN** had nearly 2.5 million viewers for a week that included the kickoff of MNF).

Yes, it's simple math that massive news breaks attract more viewers to pay TV and broadcast networks, but a growing number of cord-cutters and cord-nevers, especially younger demos, are also flocking to other corners of the TV news ecosystem for coverage, including FAST channels streaming on CTV platforms such as **The Roku Channel, Amazon Fire TV** and **YouTube**. In fact, many TV viewers who didn't have access to cable or an antenna last week instead turned to FAST channels like **CNN Headlines**, **NBC News Now**, **ABC News Live** and **LiveNOW from Fox** to follow the stories.

"News has become one of the more popular genres in FAST over the last few years, with significant growth in both the number of channels and programs available as well as level of viewer interest," *Jason Wiese*, EVP, Strategic Insights & Measurement of the **VAB**, told ***CFX***. "This is being driven both by national news brands and local TV stations and cable channels, many of whom are creating FAST channels to connect with, and extend their brand to, cord-cutters and cord-nevers."

Indeed, Nielsen's **Gracenote** reported that news content made up 9.9% of FAST programming in 3Q25, a more than 2% increase from 7.8% in the prior quarter. And it looks like venturing into this space is paying off, as ***CFX*** has learned that several news networks saw increased FAST engagement during last week's breaking news.

ABC News Live's daytime coverage of the Kirk shooting saw a 56% increase in daily FAST engagement compared to the trailing 30-day average, while NBC News Now saw a 20% week over week increase in viewership last week. Meanwhile, CNN Headlines had 1 million-minute views for several hours Wednesday and Thursday during its live CNN Headlines Express shows.

This isn't an isolated incident, either. There's a trend of FAST news channels seeing gains while covering other recent major



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breaking news events. For example, coverage on the day of the *Trump* assassination on Saturday, July 13, 2024 gave ABC News Live a 3.5x spike in daily FAST engagement vs the average across the trailing six weekends. The channel also saw a 7x spike in daily engagement on Election Night last November vs the trailing 30-day average. More recently, the shootings of two elected officials in Minnesota in June resulted in a 163% increase in daily engagement vs the average across the trailing six weekends.

NBC News Now has seen similar results while covering other major stories this year. The channel saw top viewership days while reporting on the California wildfires, the DC plane crash, the U.S. bombing of a nuclear facility in Iran and the New Year's terrorist attack in New Orleans.

Unlike ABC and NBC's FAST news channels, CNN Headlines isn't currently available on YouTube, the most-watched video platform on televisions in the U.S., according to Nielsen. That said, the cable net's FAST channel is reaching more than two million viewers a day and up to 30 million per month. Maybe CNN should consider YouTube as another distributor for its FAST—a quick look at LiveNow from Fox, ABC News Live, NBC News Now' videos last Wednesday show major spikes in viewership when compared to the streams from previous days.

These news channels are just a search away on YouTube, which also aggregates news content in its Live hub. FAST platforms are also putting in the work to make sure viewers can find the news content they're looking for, especially during major breaking news. For example, The Roku Channel organizes its news channels by local, national and international in its Live TV hub, making scrolling through channels in each category a pretty straightforward experience. It also prominently features watch options on the home screen during major current events.

Similarly, on Wednesday, a banner on the Fire TV home screen pointed to Kirk news coverage and led to several of the FAST channels mentioned above. For the cordless viewer, live coverage was just a button press away.

NTCA CEO TO STEP DOWN

Another major industry association is losing their CEO. *Shirley Bloomfield* announced on Tuesday during the **NTCA – The Rural Broadband Association**'s Fall Conference that she would retire as head of the association in March. It's a bit of an epidemic. **NCTA** President/CEO *Michael Powell* is passing the torch to former U.S. Senator *Cory Gardner* next week. In April, former **FCC** Chair *Ajit Pai* took over the top job at wireless association **CTIA** following *Meredith Attwell Baker*'s retirement. **WICT Network** CEO *Maria Brennan* just revealed she'll be leaving the women in media, entertainment and tech association in April, with a search for a successor underway. "Many of you know my creed in leadership that we all have a finite time to leave our world better than we found it. And part of that recognition is knowing when the time has come in the life cycle of an organization to have fresh leadership, perspective, vision and a longer runway to get the job done," Bloomfield wrote in an email to members and colleagues. Her tenure began in July 2010, though she was at the association from 1986-2007 as VP, Government Affairs. In the hiatus, she worked in federal relations for **Qwest** and **Verizon**. Her time at NTCA has been punctuated by a fight to ensure the Universal Service Fund would survive. A major victory came in June when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the fund is constitutional, overturning a lower court. Of course, now there's the ongoing debate of USF reform, with NTCA among the orgs submitting recommendations this week to a bipartisan and bicameral Congressional Universal Service Fund Working Group. "I am proud of what we've accomplished, but I'm even more excited about what lies ahead for this industry. Rural broadband is no longer an afterthought—it's essential infrastructure, a driver of opportunity and a national priority," Bloomfield wrote. "I will leave confident in the momentum we've built and the strong foundation in place with a strategic plan focused on how to tackle the challenges to come."

POLICY AT SCTE TECHEXPO25

For a conference called **SCTE TechExpo25**, there's going to be quite a lot of policy talk. It helps that the annual cable tech conference is being held in D.C., with budget-conscious government officials able to stay inside the Beltway and attend. So far, **FCC** Commissioners *Anna Gomez* and *Olivia Trusty* are scheduled to speak during the Tech Policy track, as is **NTIA** Administrator *Arielle Roth*. FCC Chairman *Brendan Carr* was added last week to the main stage for Monday's General Session kickoff—a nice get for the cable industry. Carr did not appear at the **NAB Show** in April—though he has kicked off a series of proceedings at the FCC that could relax rules for broadcasters. And while broadcasters were gathered at their annual conference in Vegas, the FCC Media Bureau started a proceeding to seek input on **NAB** petition for a rulemaking to establish a clear timeline for the complete transition to ATSC 3.0/NextGen TV. Maybe cable will get a wish list item fulfilled this month? In addition to programming the Tech Policy track, **NCTA** will present The Continuum, a 10,000-square foot interactive space on the exhibit floor to show off how technology and policy converge. Demos focus on the impact of multigig speeds, rural broadband builds and **CableLabs** spectrum monitoring for dynamic spectrum sharing. A new NCTA docufilm also will be playing: "After the Storm," which spotlights broadband recovery efforts after disasters.

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FIBER FRENZY

Ziply Fiber will soon begin construction in Lewiston, Idaho, and Prosser, Washington, connecting homes and businesses in both communities to its fiber network that offers symmetrical download and upload speeds ranging from 100 Mbps to 50 Gigs, with plans starting at $20/month. – **C Spire** is expanding its fiber network to Puckett, Mississippi, with construction expected to be completed within the next three months. The project will give nearly 200 Puckett residents access to C Spire Fiber's services.

UNIVERSAL ADS LAUNCHES GEN AI VIDEO CREATION TOOL

Universal Ads, a one-stop TV advertising platform, launched a new in-platform ad creation tool that allows advertisers to create commercials using generative AI, no pre-existing video assets required. Brands can upload their existing marketing materials to the tool to create 15-second ads. The new tool is currently in beta and being rolled out to select advertisers throughout the month. The AI-Powered Video Generator was developed in partnership with **Creatify**—an AI platform that recently received a new investment from **Comcast Ventures**.

VERSANT-LEAGUE ONE DEAL

Versant, the company made up of linear assets spinning off from **Comcast** and **NBCUniversal**, inked a multiyear rights deal with **League One Volleyball**. The agreement will see the **USA Network** air exclusive telecasts of the league's "Match of the Week" on Wednesdays at 8pm. The network will also air the League One playoffs and championship matches. This is the second sports rights deal Versant has closed in recent weeks, with a $95 million deal cut in August that extends its agreement with the USGA, keeping the U.S. Open, Women's Open and other golf tournaments on NBC, Peacock and Versant cable nets USA and **Golf Channel** through 2032.

PEOPLE

ACA Connects announced that *Jack Latzer* will serve as its new EVP and COO, starting at the end of September. Latzer was most recently VP, Production Solutions at **NCTI**, where he worked for more than 20 years. He will succeed *John Higginbotham*, who has led ACAC's daily operations since 2020 and will retire after the **ACA Connects Summit** in March. ACAC President/CEO *Grant Spellmeyer* extended his "heartfelt thanks" to Higginbotham for being a "steady hand through a period of significant change." – **Schurz Communications** appointed *John Schurz* as SVP, People and Culture. He took on the role on Sept. 2 following the retirement of *Scott Schurz,* who held the position for more than a decade. *John Schurz* was previously President/GM of **Orbitel Communications**, a **Schurz Broadband Group**, and is the President of the **Southwest Cable Communications Association**. *Latisha Rose* will step in as Orbitel's Interim GM.

HONORS

Hats off to **YES Networks**' *John "Flip" Filippelli*, who received the Governors' Award from the New York Chapter of the **National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences** on Tuesday. Filippelli, who transitioned earlier this year from Executive Producer and President of Production and Programming at the YES Network to Senior Advisor at YES, is the first sports producer to receive the Governors' Award. Previous honorees include John Sterling, NBA Hall of Famer Walt "Clyde" Frazier, Katie Couric and Dan Rather. Filippelli has earned more than 100 National and 100 local Emmy nominations during his career.

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