WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 15, 2025 VOLUME 36 | NO.190

Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Docufilm Debut: NCTA Tells the Story of Broadband Restoration

Sixteen months ago, **NCTA** debuted a 20-minute documentary to showcase the realities of deploying broadband across the U.S. Now, it's spotlighting one of the tougher aspects of keeping the country's communications operating: the critical recovery efforts that take place in areas hit by natural disasters.

The Internet & Television Association premiered an eight-minute docufilm "After the Storm" on Wednesday, taking viewers along with broadband crews as they clean up in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene, Hurricane Milton and the Palisades Fire. The film includes footage shot on location throughout L.A., Tampa, Georgia and North Carolina to highlight the arduous tasks teams take on to get vital networks back online, even amid the levels of devastation.

NCTA's two films and the **Syndeo Institute at The Cable Center**'s upcoming "Hotwired" documentary mark an industry trend to give stakeholders and the general public more of a personal look into broadband's intricacies. Hotwired, which will chronicle the history and innovations within cable and connectivity, is currently targeting a release for 2027 as it continues the early stages of production and fundraising.

An overarching theme woven throughout After the Storm was promoting the collaboration needed to restore connectivity in hard-hit communities in an efficient manner. *Brian Dietz*, NCTA's SVP, Strategic Communications and the film's producer, said calling attention to coordination in recovery efforts was one of the goals the association had when making After the Storm. ***CFX*** caught up with Dietz to find a little more out about the documentary and what NCTA hopes to accomplish with it.

What inspired NCTA to create "After the Storm," and what did you want audiences, industry stakeholders and policymakers to take away from it?

Our inspiration came in the aftermath of the hurricanes that slammed several southern states in the fall of 2024 and hearing from our member companies about the sheer destruction that was left behind. They shared stories about the challenges of reconnecting their networks in the immediate aftermath because of coordination challenges between power companies and other responders, leading to delays and often requiring repairs to be completed more than once because of lines being cut. Our goal with the film is to underscore the importance of broadband networks being a vital connection needing to be reconnected quickly after outages and how better coordination between providers, power companies, local governments and others is critical to ensuring more rapid and effective response and restoration.

The film offers a behind-the-scenes look at broadband restoration. What was most surprising or moving to capture during production?

The most surprising thing to me was seeing first-hand how many miles of the Asheville, North Carolina, area was completely wiped away and still in a state of recovery several months after Hurricane Helene hit. It was utterly shocking to see cars along river banks, boats suspended against trees and hundreds of homes and businesses torn from their foundations. I don't know that



© 2025 Access Intelligence, LLC. Federal copyright law prohibits unauthorized reproduction by any means and imposes fines of up to $150,000 for violations.

anyone can understand what these communities went and are going through without seeing this in person.

How does NCTA plan to use "After the Storm" beyond its release?

We have a comprehensive promotional strategy to get the film in front of federal and state policymakers and other stakeholders who are typically involved in responding to natural disasters. This includes upcoming screenings at some industry and intergovernmental conferences as well as advertising in publications that cater to the different segments we aim to reach.

Would NCTA consider cutting these docufilms up into PSAs for members to run?

Yes, we absolutely would edit the docufilms for use by our members and already share the raw video footage that we capture on these location shoots. These projects are meant to showcase the industry by featuring the hard work and dedication of employees that are working every day to build and repair networks all over America and the more ways we can use them, the better.

"After the Storm" follows the "Every Last Mile" documentary that debuted in 2024. Are there plans in the works for more films to come?

It is a medium that we definitely have enjoyed wading into and is a powerful storytelling tactic. These projects have been a highlight of my career and I hope we can extend the franchise!

COX-SONY SCOTUS SHOWDOWN

It's the music labels' turn to tell the **U.S. Supreme Court** why it should reject **Cox Communications**' challenge of a Fourth Circuit ruling that determined ISPs can be held liable for materially contributing to copyright infringement. "Cox's brief portrays this as a case about whether 'providing general-purpose products or services to the public' knowing that some users may misuse them to infringe triggers secondary liability. It is not," read the brief filed Wednesday by **Sony** and other owners of copyrighted musical works. "No one thinks that merely providing goods or services capable of infringing uses constitutes contributory liability. But the law is quite different when it comes to one who supplies a good or service to known serial infringers knowing that they will likely continue using it to infringe." The music companies point to the 12-day trial in 2019 in which a jury found Cox liable for willful vicarious and contributory infringement of all 10,017 copyrighted works alleged and ordered to pay $1 billion in damages. In 2024, the Fourth Circuit upheld the jury's finding of willful contributory infringement, but threw out the $1 billion verdict. The music companies said the three—and often more—infringement notices Cox received for each subscriber at issue were sufficient to establish that the cable operator knew each was likely to infringe again. And they pushed back hard against Cox's argument that terminating service for anonymous users for infringement through 57,000 of its internet connections could mean shuttering connections of hospitals, universities and even regional ISPs. "While Cox waxes poetic about the centrality of internet access to modern life, it neglects to mention that it had no qualms about terminating 619,711 subscribers for nonpayment over the same period that it terminated just 32 for serial copyright abuse," the labels wrote. "And while Cox stokes fears of innocent grandmothers and hospitals being tossed off the internet for someone else's infringement, Cox put on zero evidence that any subscriber here fit that bill." Cox has some big supporters, with the **DOJ** supporting its challenge. "'Mere knowledge of actual infringing uses' is an insufficient basis for imposing secondary liability on the seller of goods or services that are used to commit infringement," the DOJ wrote in an amicus brief. Others filing friend of the court briefs in support of Cox include **Google**, **X**, **Public Knowledge**, **CTIA**, **ACA Connects** and **USTelecom**.

BUNDLES VS FRAGMENTATION

A talking point during a live TV panel at **Cynopsis ScreenShift** this week was how bundling can address the increasingly fragmented live sports landscape as media rights continue to shift to streaming services. "What people really want is a simpler way to watch all of their stuff, whether it's scripted [or] it's sports," said *Jon Geigengack*, Founder/Principal, **Hub Entertainment Research**. "What's interesting to me is that we're already seeing frustration rise, even though sports have only been shifting in earnest for a couple of years, but it just shows the sense of urgency that people have about being able to find their favorite team, be able to find that game easily." He named **UFC**'s move to make **Paramount+** the exclusive broadcaster of the MMA company's events as a sports rights deal that will make it easier for fans to find and watch that content. But that's a vastly different approach than what the **NBA**, **NFL** and **MLB** are doing across linear and streaming. Geigengack suggested platforms collaborate with their competitors to "make an experience where people can get as much of their sports as possible in one spot is going to be good for everybody." He added that while it's too early to give a verdict on how effective the sports bundle is against fragmentation, the **ESPN** and **Fox One** DTC bundle that launched in October gives these brands "an early read on it."

NBC NEWS LAYOFFS

A round of layoffs hit **NBC News** on Wednesday, reportedly impacting 150 jobs. The cuts are said to have affected members of both **NBCUniversal News Group** and NBC News, with Deadline reporting that the layoffs are partly due to NBC News

Cablefax Daily (ISSN 1069-6644) is published daily by Access Intelligence, LLC | www.cablefax.com | 301.354.2101 | Editorial Director, Ad Tech and Convergent Media: Sarah Sluis, 212.621.4706, ssluis@accessintel.com | Editorial Director: Amy Maclean, 301.354.1760, amaclean@accessintel.com | SVP Media Group: Dave Colford, 631.786.9796, dcolford@accessintel.com | Sr Editor: John Saavedra, 908.477.1758, jsaavedra@accessintel.com | Editor: Noah Ziegler, 301.354.1704, nziegler@accessintel.com | Account Executive: Harry Singh, 917.832.0064, hsingh@accessintel.com | Marketing Manager: Lauren Toolen, ltoolen@accessintel.com | Sr Prod Mgr: Joann Fato, jfato@accessintel.com | Kerry Smith, Divisional President, Chief Marketer Network, ksmith@accessintel.com | Group Subs/Subscription Questions, Client Services: 301.354.2101, clientservices@accessintel.com | Annual subscription price: $1,999.00/year | Access Intelligence, LLC, 9211 Corporate Blvd., 4th Floor, Rockville, MD 20850

How I got HERE



BYRON
Allen
CHAIRMAN/CEO
ALLEN MEDIA GROUP

As far as media moguls go, Byron Allen is one of the few whose career has been shaped by the comedy business. Today, Allen is the Chairman/CEO of Allen Media Group, which boasts a portfolio that includes The Weather Channel, a group of broadcast stations, cable and digital networks and the streaming platform Local Now, but during a panel at Advertising Week New York last week, Allen credited his early years wandering the halls of NBC studios as a teenager in the '70s and the people he met while working as a young comedian for educating him on the ins and outs of the television business.

That journey began when his mother, entertainment executive Carolyn Folks, got a job as a publicist at NBC, which allowed him to witness firsthand how TV was made. "I would just go and watch them tape 'The Tonight Show' with Johnny Carson, and I would just stand there, and I would watch Johnny do the show, and I watched his every move," Allen said. "Then I would walk across the hall and watch a guy named Redd Fox tape a show called 'Sanford and Son.'"

While reminiscing about his days as a teen comedian, Allen recalled telling "Good Times" star Jimmie Walker that he needed to ask his mom for permission when the comedian invited him to join his writing team, which also happened to include two young up-and-comers named Jay Leno and David Letterman. Allen started out getting paid $25 a joke, which allowed him to quit his paper route. Allen eventually got a shot to perform stand-up comedy on The Tonight Show at the age of 18, which then led to him being tapped to host the comedic reality show "Real People."

Allen also quickly became interested in the business of show business. One of his most important teachers was producer Al Masini, whom he met at his first TV convention in NYC when he was 19. "I walked into the New York Hilton, it was packed. And I said, 'Who's the smartest guy in this building?' And they said, 'Al Masini," Allen recalled, explaining that the producer was pitching "Entertainment Tonight" at the time. "I watched him sell Entertainment Tonight to these TV stations, and I walked up and I introduced myself. I said, 'Mr. Masini, I heard you're the best in the business, and I'm here to learn from you. Where are we having dinner tonight?"

Masini happened to be taking clients out for dinner at an Italian restaurant and Allen asked him to save him a seat, which the producer did, and class was in session. Allen credited Masini as one of the people who most inspired and pushed him to start his own business. "I remember him telling me, 'I started from my dining room table when I was 36.' Years later, he said, 'Byron, you're younger than me, start from your dining room table.' And that's how I started my company from my dining room table."

- John Saavedra

no longer supporting news operations for **MSNBC** and **CNBC**, which will soon live under the umbrella of **Versant Media**, the new, cable net-heavy company set to spin off from NBCU by EOY.

VIAMEDIA'S AI-CENTRIC REBRAND

Ad tech platform **Viamedia** is going all in on AI with a rebrand that reflects its commitment to the cutting-edge tech. Meet Viamedia.ai, a name that represents the company's "deep investment in artificial intelligence powered innovation, automation and intelligent omni-channel media delivery" as well as its evolution beyond television. The move follows the company's acquisition of AI-driven digital advertising platform **LocalFactor**.

HUMBARD ANNOUNCES UP EXIT

UP Entertainment is getting ready to say goodbye to its founder and CEO. The company revealed *Charley Humbard* will step away at the end of 2025, 21 years after he first established the network as **Gospel Music Channel**. Humbard oversaw UP as it expanded into new brands throughout the years, such as the cable network **aspireTV** and streaming platforms **UP Faith & Family**, **aspireTV+** and **GaitherTV+**. Before UP, Humbard was a senior executive at **Discovery Networks** and a founding member of Discovery International Networks. He said he feels confident UP will continue to grow "having just completed two of its highest revenue and profit years in the company's history." Filling in Humbard's CEO seat will be *Philip Manwaring*, who has been with the company since 2008 and was most recently UP's CFO/CTO/Head of Streaming. *Reta Peery* is being promoted from Chief Administrative and Operations Officer/General Counsel to President/COO.

NBA TV, NBA APP GET A REFRESH

It's a new era for **NBA TV** since it's no longer being operated through **Warner Bros. Discovery** and **TNT Sports** and now the **NBA**'s responsibility. The league said the reimagined linear network, which **Optimum** dropped this month after failing to reach a renewal, will begin offering basketball content and original programming starting Oct. 15. That coincides with the launch of a multi-platform streaming offering that'll also air live games, shows, highlights and more. This year, NBA TV will air 60 regular-season games, in addition to hundreds of contests featuring top prospects from international leagues.

FREE LIVE SPORTS FOR BMW, TIVO

Free Live Sports will deploy 45 FAST channels on smart TVs with **TiVo** OS and in BMW vehicles that are equipped with the DTS AutoStage Video Service Powered by TiVo. The connected car entertainment platform was introduced by TiVo parent **Xperi** two years ago and is available in select BMW models worldwide. TiVo-compatible TVs in Europe and North America can get the channels as well, which include **Red Bull TV**, **Tennis Channel**, **Golf Network**, **Pac-12 Insider** and **World Poker Tour**.

Think about that for a minute...

Utility Competition

Commentary by Steve Effros

In a conversation I had with him many years ago, John Malone, then CEO of Telecommunications Inc (TCI)—the largest cable company at the time—asked if I thought we could get "Washington" to regulate cable as a "public utility." He really liked the idea of building a new telecommunications infrastructure on the basis of being a government-granted monopoly with a guaranteed rate of return, like the telephone companies. At the time I said no. Today, I'm not so sure.

Think about it. The "cable" industry did what we said we were going to do: build an entirely new nationwide infrastructure with almost all private funds. The infrastructure was principally financed from subscription revenue for delivering video programming. But the technology was intentionally designed to do far more. Broadband data and voice transmission were always part of the future mix, and of course now they are the primary generators of new use.

Yes, there were some limited places that simply were uneconomic to build. And, predictably, once cable/broadband was recognized as a "must have" service, like many other "utilities" such as electric, gas, water, sewer and telephones, then the government stepped in to not only require that service be extended to entire political subdivisions, but to subsidize construction with billions of dollars where it was simply not economically viable to build. That's what the current BEAD (Broadband Equity, Access and Deployment) program is all about.

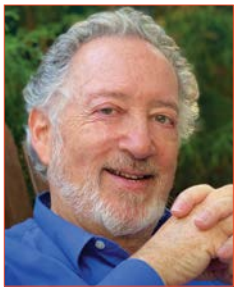
There's no longer any question that our systems should be considered "utilities." Recently an FCC Commissioner said that more had to be done about the constant problem of the theft of our copper wire. She said: "Communications infrastructure is not just metal and wires. It is critical infrastructure, on par with our power grid, our water systems, and our transportation networks. When copper is stolen from an abandoned building, it's scrap. When copper is ripped out of a live fiber line, it's sabotage and an attack, because it puts lives at risk…"

So Dr. Malone's musing has now become true. Cable/Broadband has become a utility, at least in part. Our value is no longer questioned. Our infrastructure is recognized as a necessity. But the one part of what John was dreaming about that didn't happen was the government monopoly with a guaranteed rate of return.

And so we are now in a fiercely competitive world of alternate delivery mechanisms with constantly changing business models all trying to figure out how to deliver this utility service. It's not easy. The economics of scale continues to force consolidation. The explosion of options is creating major frustrations for both consumers (viewers) and producers (entertainment and information) because of the "paradox of choice." That is, there's so much of it folks can't decide. They start choosing less, not more. The result is that what they want to watch, or create, costs more, not less. That's the opposite of what the theory was behind encouraging competition rather than "public utility" (monopoly) service, at least for the infrastructure.

Where does that leave us? Well, instead of a single linear, easy-to-use service for video delivery, there is now a plethora of choice. According to a recent survey, consumers are accessing close to 11 different video services. The cost, including delivery of those services, is higher, not lower, than the original linear "cable service" model. Are consumers happy with all this? Nope. They are rightly complaining about how difficult it has gotten to find what they want to see. And the producers of entertainment and information are experiencing such fragmented audiences that they are having trouble finding a viable business model.

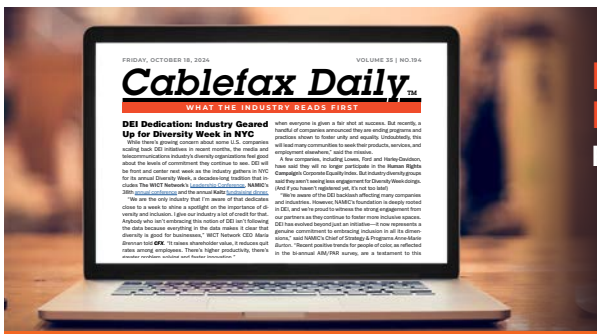
I think "utility competition" will ultimately come down to who is successful at providing that other thing; consistent quality and ease of use, known as customer service.



Steve

steve@effros.com

(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.)



HELP YOUR BRAND STAND OUT FROM THE CROWD WITH Cablefax Daily

PARTNER WITH US TODAY TO:

- Send targeted eblasts to an engaged audience comprised of senior leaders
- Advertise in our Daily newsletter, send to 43,000+ readers
- Promote your brand
- ...And MORE!

For more information, contact Harry Singh at 917-832-0064 or hsingh@accessintel.com