

Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

CEO Showtime: NAMIC, WICT & NCTA Take the Stage on LDW Day 2

NAMIC kicked off **Leadership Development Week** by announcing *Sandy Nunez* as its new President/CEO and she made her big debut in that role Tuesday. Welcoming her to the stage at the Marriott Marquis in NYC was NAMIC Board Chair and **A+E** SVP of Content Distribution *Emory Walton*, who said that Nunez's career "tells the story of a leader who consistently delivers results and uplifts others along the way." Walton, who graduated with Nunez from NAMIC's Executive Leadership Development Program, praised her "drive, focus and genuine ability to build authentic connection." Nunez was greeted by plenty of applause from a lively crowd under the yellow and green lights of the ballroom.

In her opening address on Day 1 of NAMIC's Annual Conference, Nunez said that she was incredibly honored to lead the association and that her focus now is to "build on NAMIC's strong foundation, while reimagining how we prepare, support and celebrate the next generation of industry leaders," calling this the start of a "new era of renewal and reinvention." She added that seeing so many people gathered for this year's conference "reminds me why NAMIC matters now more than ever."

"Accelerating Inclusive Leadership" is the theme of this year's gathering and Nunez reflected on what that means. "Our industry is evolving fast. Platforms, audiences and opportunities are shifting every day, but what endures is the power of diverse voices to drive creativity, connection and growth,"

she said. "NAMIC has always been that catalyst, and I say this not just as CEO, but as someone who's hugely benefited from this organization... I know firsthand how NAMIC opens doors, builds confidence and turns potential into leadership."

Just an hour before NAMIC conference attendees welcomed their new CEO, **WICT Network** members said farewell to their own. *Maria Brennan*, who will step down as the association's President/CEO next year, fittingly closed out her final WICT Leadership Conference in the role with some brief remarks.

"I have to say somebody needs to get fired for making that right before I have to do this," Brennan said at the top, referring to a touching "thank you" video from WICT members that played before she took the stage. (WICT Global Board Chair and **TV One & CLEO TV** President *Michelle Rice* recorded the best clip, joking that Brennan "taught me so many important things, like the importance of wine at meetings.") "I really don't often get nervous, but I'm really shaky," Brennan said following the video. "It's hard to come back from that."

"I stand before this remarkable gathering, surrounded by the heartbeat of the industry that I've devoted so much of my life to," Brennan continued. "I'm just filled with so much gratitude and so much pride and a little bit of disbelief. I can't believe that I'm retiring. I'm only 29."

Brennan looked back at her over 16-year tenure at WICT, recalling how she "took a leap, a calculated risk" when she stepped down as President of **American Women in Radio and Television** (now the **Alliance for Women in Media**) and that



VIEW HONOREES

Congratulations 2025 Voices of Impact & Workplace Culture Honorees!

The Cablefax team is thrilled to announce this year's honorees for the Voices of Impact & Workplace Culture Awards, celebrating the individuals and organizations driving meaningful change, fostering inclusivity, and shaping a more dynamic and equitable workplace across the media and broadband industries.

Visit our site to explore the full honoree list and read their inspiring Q&As.

the “risk changed my entire life and the trajectory of the life of those around me...We built something so spectacular, programs that change lives, set guideposts, shift cultures, build relationships that span continents now.” She signed off by thanking her team, the WICT board and chapter leaders: “My successor, whoever she may be, we don’t know yet, but she’s quite lucky to have you and your talents, and I really want to thank you for making my life not just more successful, but so much more enjoyable.”

Cory Gardner, who marks his one-month anniversary as NCTA’s President/CEO this week, had a busy day on the leadership development circuit as well, speaking at both WICT and NAMIC conferences. He shared some “Pearls of Wisdom” at the popular TED Talk-style WICT session, saying, “Leadership is about not just seeing a wall, but being able to figure out how to break through that wall and get around that wall. and do whatever you can to get through that door.” He also stressed the importance of “creating opportunities to bring others along with us,” praising his NCTA predecessor, *Michael Powell*, for his efforts to “lead with others as a partner.”

Later that afternoon, Nunez introduced Gardner back to the stage at NAMIC, where he reflected on the meaning of Leadership Development Week. “This week represents an investment in the future of our business and investment in our leaders,” Gardner said. “Leadership Week reminds us that the success of our industry will always come down to how well we nurture, how well we challenge and how well we empower the next generation of leaders. Because of all the work that we get to do, all of the work that we have in front of us, the best is yet to come.”

WBD UP FOR SALE

Warner Bros. Discovery put up a “For Sale” sign in its front yard Tuesday morning. After weeks of speculation regarding a **Paramount** bid and potential interest from **Netflix** and **Comcast**, WBD confirmed it has begun “a review of strategic alternatives to maximize shareholder value, in light of unsolicited interest the company has received from multiple parties for both the entire company and Warner Bros.” That’s all while it continues to move along with the separation of Warner Bros. and **Discovery Global**, but for now, WBD’s board will assess a number of options, including whether or not it should remain on a path for separation by mid-2026, a transaction involving the entire company or separate deals with Warner Bros. and/or Discovery Global. Another consideration is whether the company can implement a separation

structure that’d enable a merger of Warner Bros. and spin-off of Discovery Global to our shareholders.” No deadline to complete the review was set, and WBD made sure to note the process doesn’t guarantee another deal will take place. **Allen & Company**, **J.P. Morgan** and **Evercore** are serving as WBD’s financial advisors. Considering the existing interest in WBD, it has the ability to get choosy and deny offers it deems low. There’s no immediate urgency given that WBD is well on the way toward separating its company. Among contenders, **Bernstein Research Group** has Paramount at the top. “We struggle to see a credible standalone future for PSKY as the kind of company it aspires to be,” Bernstein wrote. While Comcast is about to undergo a separation and create **Versant**, it doesn’t have a solid area of growth. “NBCU has high quality assets, including the rights to NFL, NBA, and the Olympics, but those alone aren’t sufficient to drive sustained engagement and growth. Peacock still lacks destination status for general entertainment,” Bernstein said. As for Netflix, a move for WBD would be more defensive of its competitive stance as it doesn’t necessarily need WBD’s assets.

VERIZON-NEXSTAR WATCH

Verizon Fios customers in Richmond, Albany, Buffalo, Syracuse and other markets are being warned that they may lose **Nexstar** stations if the two companies don’t reach a new retransmission consent deal by Oct. 24. That’s when the current contract expires. “We are currently in negotiations to reach a fair and reasonable agreement on your behalf so we can continue to offer these channels to you. Unfortunately, we simply cannot agree to the significant price increases they have asked for to date,” Verizon said in a notice to customers Tuesday. “In the event we are unable to reach an agreement by October 24, you may lose access to these channels on Fios TV. The rising cost of programming is the single biggest factor in higher TV bills and we are fighting to keep prices reasonable for you.” Nexstar didn’t respond to a request for comment by deadline. If there is a blackout, it could prevent fans from watching upcoming NFL games such as the Kansas City Chiefs at the Buffalo Bills (**CBS** Buffalo) and the Atlanta Falcons at the New England Patriots (CBS Providence). Linear cable network **NewsNation** would also be impacted. **Altaviber** filed a retrans consent complaint against Nexstar at the **FCC** over the summer, complaining that the broadcaster failed to negotiate in good faith by tying carriage of its **NBC** Dayton station to carriage of NewsNation in the Cincinnati DMA, where Nexstar has no broadcast television stations. The complaint is still pending. In 2023,

Nexstar and **DirectTV** had a blackout that lasted more than 75 days. Retrans rumbles are top of mind as Nexstar pursues its proposed \$6.2 billion deal to buy **TEGNA**.

ARE WE IN A SPORTS MEDIA RIGHTS BUBBLE?

"It's a nuanced question," media reporter *Alex Sherman* said when asked the question during a **CNBC** panel at the **WICT Network Leadership Conference** on Tuesday. "The NFL may have more run room than a lot of other sports. So to just say the 'sports bubble,' it's like, well, what sport are we talking about here?" But he does think sports leagues should be worried: "Every logical piece of data would indicate that there has to be a level here where this thing stops again." Sherman added the major U.S. test case to keep an eye on will be when the current **MLB** media rights deals expire in 2028. "We've seen an inkling that ESPN opted out of its \$550 million a year deal for Sunday Night Baseball... Major League Baseball, sort of recreated that package, but in the aggregate, got several \$100 million less," he said. "That is going to be, I think, the big sports story for 2027-28: how much money can Major League Baseball squeeze out of this thing where the ratings are infinitesimally less than what you get for an NFL football game." Sherman also warned that "if Major League Baseball does have to take a lot less money, what will happen is the way you watch your regional games will change. You will not get it on regional sports networks anymore. You will get it on a national subscription service, so every consumer will have to alter the way they watch."

READING THE FCC'S ATSC NOTICE

NextGen TV and broadcasters' transition from ATSC 1.0 to 3.0 is [on the docket](#) for next Tuesday's **FCC** meeting. While some hope the notice is the beginning of the end of the years-long migration, the Commission's notice will collect input on topics such as encryption, digital rights management on broadcast signals and requirements for traditional pay TV providers. Those wanting to speed up the process are eyeing the potential new revenue opportunities and want an FCC-mandated deadline to sunset ATSC 1.0, while others worry about the cost and burden on consumers to get compatible TV sets. **New Street Research** thinks the FCC's notice illustrated tentative conclusions, most important of which being that it doesn't include a sunset date for 1.0 services in its current form. "Adoption of a sunset—even if the implementation is somewhat delayed—would be a powerful signal to all the critical stakeholders that the 3.0 standard is the future for broadcast television," NSR wrote, adding that the absence of a mandatory sunset will "likely reduce" near-term benefits for broadcasters hoping to utilize 3.0 services. However, the door is open for the FCC to issue a mandate down the line.

NAB previously proposed a two-part deadline in 2028 and 2030. Regarding revenues, NSR warns that broadcasters will have to compete with the likes of **AT&T**, **Verizon** and **T-Mobile**, as well as digital advertising powerhouses **Google** and **Meta** and the litany of streaming services available today. Another conclusion NSR identified is that the FCC, at least for now, doesn't appear to be keen on a tuner mandate. "Among the questions the FCC asks is whether, if it were to adopt an 3.0 tuner mandate, it should also require informational labeling of any TV broadcast receivers which do not include an 3.0 tuner, and whether such a requirement would ensure consumers have the necessary information if they wish to buy a television that has only an 1.0 tuner," said NSR, which thinks the FCC is suggesting it may adopt alternatives to a mandate. The research firm doesn't think large swaths of consumers are likely to buy 3.0 sets and receivers unless there's a deadline. Although "the transition will proceed and eventually create new opportunities for broadcasters, new enterprise competition for wireless carriers and new costs on MVPDs and manufacturers," the FCC doesn't appear to be moving as fast as supporters would like.

VERSANT BEHIND-THE-SCENES

We got some insider insights on the **NBCUniversal-Versant** split, courtesy of **CNBC** staffers speaking at a **WICT** panel. Media reporter *Lillian Rizzo* described herself as "pro-Versant," explaining that she "sees the argument in spinning it out...for the cable networks excel." She feels that splitting from a huge company like **Comcast** gives Versant the opportunity to focus on growing its brands. "It's been five years of disruption, and you know, now we can maybe see [what happens] if you really just focus on a company that doesn't have a ton of debt." Fellow reporter *Alex Sherman* added that he believes the Versant "growth narrative" from just being a spinoff of legacy cable brands will change in 18 to 24 months from now. "That will probably come through acquisition," he said.

LEADERSHIP WEEK NOTEBOOK

Leadership Development Week Day 2 kicked off with a **WICT Network** fireside chat between **FCC** Commissioner *Olivia Trusty* and **TV One** & **CLEO TV** President and **WICT** Global Board Chair *Michelle Rice*. The government shutdown was, of course, the elephant in the room, but that particular topic wasn't discussed during the 30-minute conversation. But Trusty, who connected to the conference virtually, did answer a question about what gives her the most hope for the future of communications that did tie into current events. She praised the "dedication of public servants across this agency and really across the government, especially during right now when times are a little bit challenging. People are still coming into work because they have a deep commitment

to advancing the mission of this agency.” Trusty added that “I think our job is to maintain a shared commitment to universal connectivity and ensuring that the United States leads. We might have disagreements about how to get there, but it’s important for us to stay united in those goals, because I think that will lead to better decisions and policies that stand the test of time.” – During a **NAMIC** fireside chat, **A+E Global Media** EVP of Global FAST Channels **Mark Garner** shared a piece of advice about taking risks and experimenting with new technologies: “Recognize that nine times out of 10, when you do something, you’ll do it just fine. You’ll succeed. Great job, whatever. And the 10th time you’re going to mess up, something’s going to go wrong, and don’t expect anybody to pat you on the back and say, ‘Oh, it’s okay.’ It’s going to be difficult, it’s going to be hard, it’s going to be uncomfortable. But that 10th time, you’re going to learn a whole lot more than the first nine things, so you’re going to be exponentially better on the next nine things that you do.” – The **Rewired** CEO and former CEO of **AT&T Business** **Anne Chow** was this year’s keynote speaker at **NAMIC’s** Annual Conference, where she shared her three foundational business beliefs: “Every business is a people business, leadership is a choice and it transcends and your culture is your ultimately and only sustainable competitive advantage.” That third belief was particularly insightful. “Culture is what you hear when the door is open, but importantly, culture is what happens when the door is closed,” Chow said. “Think of culture as either the sand or oil in the gears of your business, and therefore your culture is embodied in every single one of your people, especially your leaders, and that is something that no other organization can take away or recreate.”

COMCAST TAKES CARE OF BUSINESS

Comcast Business is expanding the availability of its fully managed secure networking solution built on the **Cisco** Meraki platform. The platform is now optimized and priced for emerging and distributed enterprises across the U.S. The tech stack is a cloud-first, fully integrated networking and security solution that combines SD-WAN, WiFi, switching and unified threat management (UTM) into a single, intuitive platform that’s designed for lean IT environments, with support for deployment across enterprises with 1 to 100+ sites.

HBO MAX SERVES PRICE HIKE

Quite an interesting day for **Warner Bros. Discovery**, which officially put itself up for sale. Coinciding with that was the news **HBO Max** was rolling out price increases for all of its plans. The ad-supported option will now run at \$10.99/month or \$109.99/year. The Standard ad-free plan now costs \$18.49/month or \$184.99/year, while the Premium tier increases to \$22.99/month or \$229.99/year. All changes are

effective immediately for new customers, while existing users will get a notice 30 days in advance and see the updates to their bills by Nov. 20. It’s **HBO Max’s** third price hike in the last three years.

ANTENNA LOOKS AT ESPN, FOX ONE SIGNUPS

From launch through Sept. 30, research firm **Antenna** estimates 2.1 million sign-ups to **ESPN** new streaming offering and 1.1 million sign-ups to **Fox One**. The stats don’t include existing **Disney** subscribers who switched from other plans or individuals who activated the service through an MVPD. Sign-ups tend to spike on the weekends, with **Fox** one seeing a nice lift for the Sept. 14 Philly-Kansas City NFL game. Antenna estimates some 57% of the **ESPN** subscribers opted for the new flagship Unlimited service, compared to 43% for **ESPN Select** (formerly **ESPN+**). Meanwhile, Antenna has been in the news this week for preliminary estimates on cancellations following the **Jimmy Kimmel** saga. Antenna put the number of Americans cancelling **Disney+** in September at 3 million, up from a three-month average of 1.2 million, and **Hulu’s** cancellations at 4.1 million, up from 1.9 million. They’re not official numbers though. And there was an uptick in new subscriptions to **Disney+** in September, with 2.2 million subscribing through either a paid plan or free trial (up 10% from August). Hopefully, **Disney** will provide some guidance when it reports earnings on Nov. 13.

FIBER FRENZY

Mediacom completed its multi-gig and symmetrical speed broadband upgrades in the cities of Des Moines and Cedar Rapids, expanding the company’s total number of upgraded homes and businesses by 200,000. And it’s working on upgrades in Des Moines. Add in projects in Delaware, Maryland, Florida Panhandle, Metro Minneapolis and Quad Cities, and **Mediacom** expects to offer upgrades to 1 million households by the end of 2026. Last month, **Mediacom** [launched](#) its first DOCSIS 4.0 deployment in Moline, Illinois, with CTO JR Walden noting that the operator is ahead of schedule on its upgrade—so much so that it’s contemplating bumping that number to 1.5 million.

PEOPLE

James Assey, EVP of **NCTA**, is departing the association at the end of 2025 after nearly 18 years. After joining in 2008, Assey helped shape **NCTA’s** policy and operational framework while aligning its government relations, legal, technical and communications efforts. He worked with member companies to provide guidance and initiatives, most recently seen through the policy-focused “The Continuum” exhibit at **SCTE TechExpo25**.