

Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Next-Gen: Charter's Spectrum Front Row Signals Connectivity's Future

Courtside seats to a Lakers game don't come easy—unless you're wearing an **Apple Vision Pro**. **Charter** and **Apple** are teaming up to present six games through the new "Spectrum Front Row in Apple Immersive" experience, delivering a live augmented reality view from the floor. The experience runs Jan. 9 through March 30 and is available through the **Spectrum SportsNet** and **NBA** apps. **CFX** recently demoed the experience, taking its seven unique viewing angles for a spin, and we can confirm our virtual seats were top-notch, as the NYC Apple store disappeared around us and we were immersed in the sights and sounds of the NBA on game night.

"We've got gig speeds everywhere and we're moving to multi-gig and symmetrical speeds, so the question that the entire industry has is: what's going to use it?" Charter SVP, Emerging Technology and Strategic Development **Gary Koerper** told CFX.

Spectrum Front Row is one example, with the live experience available to internet customers and video subscribers of any pay TV package that includes Spectrum SportsNet as long as they're in the Lakers' broadcast territory (Southern California, Hawaii and parts of Nevada), while all other U.S. and international markets get access to replays and highlights through NBA app approximately 24 hours after the game ends.

It marks Charter's first consumer experience that can be delivered at speeds exceeding 150 Mbps. That's "30 times the payload" of a basic 1080p **Netflix** stream, which "becomes really interesting from a network perspective because it's like adding 30 new homes for anyone that's watching it," according to Koerper. Charter is operating three different content delivery networks to support the live stream, the VOD replay and users watching via affiliate agreements. As this is just the early stages of Front Row and the Apple headset is still quite expensive for most consumers at \$3,500, the group of folks using it is still small. But as the experience scales, that 30x Netflix multiple applies and demand on the network grows.

"You have 1,000 homes, but then 30 times the payload, so you have 30,000 homes that you just added," Koerper said. He added that, while Charter's network currently has the capacity and the speed to deliver these 150 Mbps streams, "that's not necessarily the case for all network technologies. For technologies like FWA, that share capacity with mobile customers, where your TV can be a lower priority than mobile phones, the first thing that's going to be affected is the experience of Front Row."

But Spectrum Front Row is about more than just offering new ways to watch content. Charter CEO **Chris Winfrey** said during a 4Q25 earnings call in January that the goal is to show the kinds of next-gen experiences the Spectrum network can support and why it's important that content

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owners in Silicon Valley develop to those symmetrical, multi-gig capabilities.

Charter is in the process of upgrading its fiber-based network, with Winfrey reporting that the operator will have upgraded 50% of its network to symmetrical, multi-gig service by EOY. The remaining half is moving toward completion in 2027. Those upgrades offer the low-latency platform and bandwidth that power more demanding digital experiences.

Charter's collaboration with Apple is an example of what Winfrey called the "fill the pipe tour," where the operator is out in Silicon Valley to "really explain to people that this network is available there for them."

Koerper said that one of the big takeaways of Spectrum Front Row should be that "opportunity exists, not just in the NBA, but certainly other sports and events" as well as other content genres, such as dramas. He highlighted how AR allows the audience to get closer to the content than ever before. "This is really the first moment in time and technology where it all came together to change how people interact and experience something," he said. "We think connectivity can birth a whole new way of creating content that needs our network, speed and capacity."

Earlier this month, CFX attended an **NCTA** event with WifiForward to celebrate the launch of the bicameral Congressional WiFi Caucus. The gathering also featured demos from operators **Comcast** and Charter, spotlighting the innovations that more spectrum for WiFi can unlock. One of those demos was Spectrum Front Row. The clear message is: look what we can do now, but imagine what tomorrow looks like with more spectrum.

"One of the bigger questions has been, well, why do you need more unlicensed spectrum? The WiFi industry received 1200 MHz in the 6Ghz band. Is that really all used up? As Front Row scales, the reality is yeah, it will be," Koerper said. "If you're in an apartment building and just two of your neighbors are watching Front Row, that's the equivalent of adding 60 TVs to local WiFi networks that all share the same spectrum. As Front Row expands to more leagues, more sports, more games, more devices, more WiFi spectrum is a necessity."

WBD-PSKY DEADLINE WATCH

Paramount Skydance has until Monday EOD to present its best and final offer to acquire **Warner Bros. Discovery**. The companies began a limited negotiation period last week, with WBD expecting PSKY to raise its offer from \$30 per share. **MoffettNathanson** predicts PSKY will go up to "at least" \$32 per

share to put the pressure back on **Netflix**, which has matching rights once the rival offer comes in. "But if PSKY truly wants to end a bidding war today, we think a bid in the range of \$34/sh. would avoid further debate over **Discovery Global's** value," added the research firm, which also doesn't see winning the race for WBD's streaming and studio assets as a make-or-break scenario for the streamer if it chooses to bow out. "The company's core fundamental drivers of subscriber and advertising growth plus pricing power should rebuild investor confidence that WBD was truly 'nice to have' and not a 'must have.'" Only NFLX co-CEOs *Ted Sarandos* and *Greg Peters* and their team know how far the streaming giant is willing to go to add WBD's content creation machine to its business. On Friday, Sarandos told **Fox Business** that Netflix will "remain a disciplined buyer." "I don't want to get ahead of the process or deal in hypotheticals. We will know in a couple of days what the outcome is. I think we're pretty confident of what that will be," Sarandos added. However the bidding war ends, regulatory scrutiny lies ahead for either combo, even with PSKY [claiming](#) it cleared a hurdle with DOJ antitrust enforcers. A group of Senate Dems, including Minority Leader *Chuck Schumer* (D-NY), [sent a letter](#) to PSKY CEO *David Ellison* last week warning that a combo with WBD could warrant an investigation. Meanwhile, *Bloomberg* [reported](#) Monday that the DOJ is probing whether the Netflix deal would lessen competition or create a monopoly and how the streamer leverages its power in negotiations with content creators. Over the weekend, President Trump [called on](#) Netflix to remove *Susan Rice*, who served in the *Biden*, *Obama* and *Clinton* administrations, from its board.

ALTAFIBER CONTINUES PUSH FOR SOCIAL CONTRACTS

Given *Brendan Carr's* [recent comments supporting](#) the \$6.2 billion **Nexstar-Tegna** merger, some are feeling that a decision in the **FCC's** review of the matter could be imminent. That might explain why **altafiber** held virtual meetings with legal advisors of Commissioners *Anna Gomez* and *Olivia Trusty* last week, where the operator once again advocated for the use of [social contracts](#) in the event changes are made to broadcast ownership regulations. Under altafiber's proposal, broadcasters would implement retransmission consent rate reductions over a seven-year period in exchange for regulatory waivers. According to ex parte filings, altafiber said the contracts would serve as temporary methods that provide "near to mid-term regulatory certainty and relief" as the FCC considers larger-scale adjustments. The provider argued that the proposed seven-year contract would also have a lower risk of facing legal challenges,

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while also preventing the M&A floodgates from opening. “If the Commission approves the Nexstar-TEGNA transaction, it should expect a flood of consolidation,” altafiber wrote. “The first wave likely will be the ‘sidecar’ stations with whom the largest broadcasters (e.g., Sinclair and Nexstar) have management relationships and have already purchased all non-license assets with an option to obtain the FCC license upon changes in ownership restrictions... The second wave will be acquisitions of other broadcast stations, and maybe even of each other.”

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SVODS, FAST PLATFORMS GROW INVESTMENTS IN SPORTS

Recent data from **Nielsen’s** Gracenote shows just how popular sports properties are becoming on various SVODs. Gracenote’s latest Data Hub update revealed a 52% YOY jump in sports programming across **Apple TV+**, **Disney+**, **Netflix**, **Paramount+** and **Prime Video**. Total catalog growth from the five streamers increased by 20%, and while there are 20% more TV shows and 21% more movies, there are 12.5% more sports shows than there were in January 2025. Over the past year, Paramount+ overtook Prime Video and Netflix as the leader in streaming sports at the individual game/event level. That was driven by **Paramount’s** acquisition of **UFC’s** rights, helping fuel a 219% jolt in Paramount+’s sports content portfolio. However, over that same timeframe, Disney+ saw its sports catalog dip 23%. Another aspect of sports viewing that Gracenote noticed was the increased popularity and usage of FAST channels. In an analysis of 2,060 FAST channels available worldwide, Gracenote found that sports content grew 30% YOY—though news programming was another area seeing FAST growth, with the category seeing a 58% increase.

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CARRIAGE

With **MLB** Opening Day a month out, **DirectTV** is adding the league’s **MLB FAST** channel to its **MyFree DirectTV** offering tomorrow. That’ll give customers access to spring training, Cactus and Grapefruit League play and daily highlights. Once the regular season begins March 25-26, it will also have a weekly replay of a featured MLB game from the prior week, Minor League game replays and other MLB programs.

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FIBER FRENZY

Ritter Communications is investing \$50 million to grow its RightFi fiber network in North Texas. Construction is already underway in the project’s first area, Seagoville, which will bring speeds of up to 5 Gbps for homes and up to 100 Gbps for businesses.

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RATINGS

It was another banner day for **NBCUniversal’s** Olympics coverage. Thanks to the U.S. women’s hockey team’s gold-clinching

overtime win against Canada and *Alysa Liu’s* gold-medal figure skating free skate performance, NBCU averaged 26.7 million viewers for the live afternoon window (2-5pm ET) and “Prime Time in Milan” (8-11pm) on Thursday across **NBC**, **Peacock**, **USA Network** and NBCU digital platforms, per preliminary data from **Nielsen** and **Adobe Analytics**. That’s the most-watched Winter Olympics weekday coverage since February 2014. The U.S. vs Canada battle averaged 5.3 million viewers on USA and Peacock, becoming the most-watched women’s hockey game on record. The game peaked at 7.7 million viewers during the overtime period (3:45-4pm). Thursday was the 14th consecutive day where NBCU’s Winter Olympic audience eclipsed 20 million. Through Thursday, NBCU’s coverage is averaging 24.1 million viewers. That’s a whopping 93% improvement compared to the same point in the 2022 Games in Beijing.

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PROGRAMMING

Newsmax handed contract renewals to its primetime hosts *Carl Higbie* and *Greg Kelly*. Higbie leads the 6pm “Frontline” program, which Newsmax said has had double-digit ratings growth over the past year. Kelly, a former White House correspondent for **Fox News**, helms the 9pm show “Greg Kelly Reports.” – **CNN** will launch its new original series, “Standoff: The FBI, Power and Paranoia,” on March 22 at 9pm. The show explores “the fragile, high risk relationship” between presidents and FBI directors, including *James Comey’s* clash with *Donald Trump* and *J. Edgar Hoover’s* fracture with *Richard Nixon*. – **HBO** will premiere the documentary “Fukushima: A Nuclear Nightmare” on HBO and **HBO Max** on March 10 at 9pm. The doc chronicles nine harrowing days following an earthquake and tsunami that devastated Japan, as power plant workers rushed to avert an even more catastrophic nuclear disaster.

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PEOPLE

UP Entertainment SVP, Ad Sales *Matt Turner*, who leads the national sales team for **UPtv**, **aspireTv** and **Ovation**, is adding direct oversight of pricing and planning to his responsibilities. *Bridget Collins*, VP, Direct Response and Paid Programming, will continue to lead the direct response and paid programming sales for the networks. *Brittany Fetzer* has been promoted to VP, National Ad Sales, expanding her role beyond her current responsibilities in the Midwest Region. – **Roku** is adding *Patrick Harris* as SVP, Global Media Revenue. He’ll begin March 9 and oversee the company’s ad revenue growth, as well as its media innovations. Harris joins from Snap, where he was President, Americas for nearly two years. Prior to Snap, Harris spent over a decade at **Meta** and climbed to VP, Global Channels, in addition to working at **Microsoft** from 2006-11. He’ll be based in NY and report to Roku Media chief *Charlie Collier*.