CFX DAILY

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

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## DON'T FORGET!

Tonight is the early deadline to submit nominations for the ***CFX Most Powerful Women Awards***. The awards have honored hundreds of industry leaders throughout more than two decades. This year's honorees will be celebrated at a Nov. 3 awards gala in NYC. Self-nominations are encouraged. Visit the Most Powerful Women website for more information, including how to nominate.

# INDEPENDENT NETS EVOLVE AD STRATEGY

You're likely to hear plenty of debate these days about whether consolidation is a good thing or detrimental to the media industry. An interesting take comes from a group of independent programmers, including **UPtv** and **Great American Media**, who are evolving their advertising strategies to meet agencies where they are amid all the big-player consolidation.

Increasingly, media buyers are shifting their budgets to smaller groups of conglomerate-owned networks because they have less bandwidth to target audiences and inventory in a jam-packed landscape full of linear pay TV channels, SVODs, AVODs and FAST platforms. In this environment where agencies are looking to partner with fewer programmers for efficiency, independent networks with highly engaged audiences are getting the short end of the straw.

UPtv, a cable net that serves up family-friendly and uplifting programming, is an example of the disconnect. **Nielsen** ranks UPtv No. 30 among all cable networks in women 18+ C3 delivery, but according to iSpot, UPtv ranks No. 76 in advertiser spend.

"Our ratings have grown, and when we look at the ranking on audience versus ad spend, it really stands out like a sore thumb," UP Entertainment SVP, Advertising Sales *Matt Turner* told ***CFX***. "The agencies are moving more towards consolidation, and we're not blaming the agencies, we're not claiming that the agencies aren't doing their job. They're up against a lot and there's definitely somewhat of a bandwidth issue. They can only do so much. They're buying digital, they're buying streaming, CTV addressable, and of course, the priorities these days are live sports, so that gives the major conglomerates a lot of leverage, and the buyers sort of have to pick and choose, so it's fewer, bigger, better."

To adapt, UP and several other independents are partnering with a new ad platform called **Audyns**, which aggregates inventory from all its partners and packages it as a one-stop shop for agencies to buy at scale across networks. The platform, which launched in 2025, allows advertisers to go beyond traditional age and gender demos and access more customized audience segments via data-driven linear buys. In other words, buyers can get more specific with their linear targeting, a boon for independent nets with hyper-dedicated audiences that might otherwise be overlooked.

The programmers working with Audyns include UP, Great American Media, **FETV**, **Reelz**, **Ovation** and **TelevisaUnivision**. While it's true that some of these nets compete with each other, the consensus seems to be that they're stronger together.

"Audyns has identified a white space in the market as far as aggregating independent linear cable networks and putting that inventory together to sell that at scale in an audience-targeted, data-driven, linear set. That for us was a vertical we were not playing in. With Great American Family, we know we have a great value proposition, but we also know we're one network. So you put us together with other publishers, we thought, wow, there's a real opportunity there," said *Paul Brennan*, SVP, Advertising and Digital Sales at Great American Media.

While they've only been with Audyns for a short time, both UP and GAC are getting results. "We've seen the fruits of their labor. We've got a couple deals in. We're working on some things for 3Q and 4Q. They're having some upfront conversations, so we like it," Brennan shared.

UP, which signed with the ad platform at the start of the year, reported similar results. "We had one major advertiser come on board for second, and they're renewing for third. We have several others in the pipeline, many for the upfront, mostly data-driven linear," Turner said. UP is seeing particular interest from the pharmaceutical and automobile categories. "The audience segment might be somebody who has diabetes, or someone who's looking for new cars, so they can specifically find in your audience who those people are and target them in that way."

Audyns was founded by former media industry execs *Michael Strober*, whose resume includes leading sales teams at **Turner** and **Nexstar**, **Magna Global** and **Mediacom** veteran *Todd Gordon* and *Dan Aversano*, who hails from TelevisaUnivision and **Time Warner**. Strober and Aversano also co-founded datafuelX, the analytics firm that provides forecasting and optimization tools for Audyns' clients. The platform also works with advanced audience measurement solution OpenAP. The goal is to provide both sides of the buy with all the tools

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they need to book successful linear campaigns, but also offer simplicity.

"Programmers get to still do everything the same way, where they price it, they have control over the inventory. What we'll do is go speak to the agencies on their behalf as a curated marketplace, as a unified front, so it's not that they're not just buying UP Entertainment, they're buying UP and FETV and Great American," Strober explained. "It just makes it easier for two reasons: one, it provides greater scale, because now a buyer and an agency can get the benefit of all these networks, which they typically are complaining that they just don't have the bandwidth to buy them as they had previously, and they're getting one optimized plan."

Consolidation isn't slowing down any time soon, as major linear conglomerates like **Paramount Skydance** and **Warner Bros. Discovery** look to grow bigger. It's why the independents partnering with Audyns feel it's pivotal to work together and add even more members in the future.

"I'm very optimistic about where this will lead and that it will bring in incremental money for the partners," Turner said. "I also think that [Audyns] is going to be signing more partners—some will be independent, some might be somewhat semi-independent, like a mini conglomerate—but the more scale they have, the more interest there is going to be in this. I do think it's the future of how a lot of things are going to be bought."

## TRUMP NOMINATES THUMANN FOR FCC COMMISH

The **FCC** just can't stay out of headlines. Barely 24 hours after the three-headed Commission voted to eliminate the 39% audience cap, President *Trump* nominated *Danielle Thumann* to serve as an FCC Commissioner. Thumann, who currently serves as Senior Counsel to FCC Chairman *Brendan Carr* on matters before the Wireline Bureau, Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau and Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau, would serve a term through July 1, 2029, if she's confirmed. She'd take one of the agency's two remaining commissioner seats and give Republicans a 3-1 advantage—unless lone Democratic Commissioner *Anna Gomez* is removed from her position. "Congratulations to Danielle on her nomination by President Trump to serve as a Commissioner on the FCC," Carr wrote on **X**. "Danielle is a dedicated public servant and has consistently delivered policy wins from bridging the digital divide and protecting consumers to advancing public safety." Gomez also applauded the news, calling her role as commissioner "one of the most rewarding jobs in government." But she doesn't want the ball to stop rolling if Thumann is ultimately confirmed. "I look forward to continuing our work together, hopefully soon with a full Commission of five, the way this agency was built to operate," Gomez said. Thumann previously worked in Carr's office from 2021-23 before joining Crown Castle as its Senior Attorney, Government Relations. She came back to the FCC in 2024. **NCTA**, **ACA Connects** and **NAB** were quick to issue their congratulations, with the former calling attention to Thumann's experience in the private sector. "We look forward to working with her to advance policies that promote investment, innovation, and world-class wired and wireless broadband networks for consumers and businesses across the country," NCTA President/CEO *Cory Gardner* said.

## SCRIPPS MOVES FORWARD AFTER WHIRLWIND WEEK

**Scripps** was firmly among the chorus of broadcasters cheering after Thursday's **FCC** meeting that saw the agency repeal the 39% national broadcast ownership cap. Chief among the company's reasons is the anticipated influx of M&A activity, but Scripps was busy in that department during 2Q26. Most recently, it acquired the Lexington, Kentucky, **ABC** affiliate WTVQ from **Morris Network** for $15.8 million, creating a duopoly alongside WLEX (**NBC**). Scripps also had a station swap with **Gray Media** in five markets, while selling off stations in Ft. Myers, Florida, and Indianapolis. However, President/CEO *Adam Symson* acknowledged that there might be a finite window to capitalize on the friendly M&A environment. "There's potentially a balance that has to be struck right now between the opportunity to take advantage of the changes in the regulatory environment and some uncertainty that we see obviously being held up in courts," he said on Scripps' earnings call Friday morning, adding that Scripps isn't done with pursuing more opportunities. M&A is only part of the puzzle in Symson's eyes. This week, Scripps made another step toward a structural revamp, laying off 268 employees and introducing a 24/7 streaming news programming model. The broadcaster hopes the changes will lead to better financial results in the short- and