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# SEAN MCMANUS

How the CBS Sports chairman  
and his team rose to the challenge  
of production — and doing business —  
during the pandemic

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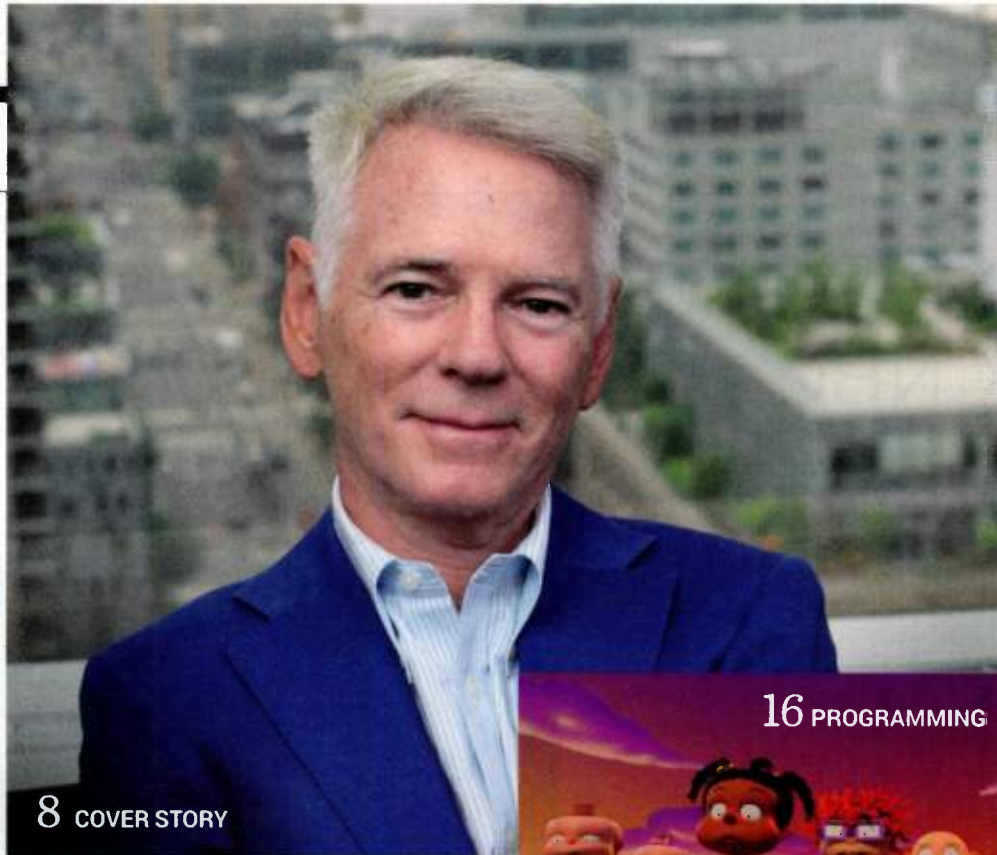
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8 COVER STORY

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CBS Sports chairman Sean McManus in his New York office (photo by Titus Kana).



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FUTURE

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# Mr. Wonderful Presides Over CNBC's New 'Money Court'

Kevin O'Leary of 'Shark Tank' serves as judge in financial disputes



By Michael Malone  
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**M**oney Court, a primetime series hosted by Kevin O'Leary, began on CNBC Wednesday, Aug. 11, in primetime. O'Leary is best known as tough-love entrepreneur Mr. Wonderful on Shark Tank. On Money Court, he's essentially the judge, presiding over financial disputes between partners.

O'Leary, who spoke at length about Money Court and Shark Tank on the B+C/Multichannel News podcast Series Business, said cases on the program will be instantly relatable to viewers. "Everybody sees themselves in these cases. They have this story somewhere in their background," he said. "These are not unique. People fight about money all the time in America."



The litigants on Money Court include business partners, husbands and wives, and siblings. Trial attorney Katie Phang and former judge Ada Pozo help O'Leary come to his verdict.

"This is not my first rodeo on television," O'Leary said. "You really

**Ada Pozo (l.), Kevin O'Leary and Katie Phang will convene for CNBC's Money Court.**

want to cast it right. We went through dozens of different combinations to get the right mix with Katie and Ada. You just know when you're testing, when it clicks."

Managing what he called a "huge portfolio of private investments," O'Leary called Money Court "an extension of what I do every day."

Partner tension has been around as long as partners have been around, but disputes have become more common in the COVID era, he said, with the economy in turmoil, businesses transforming on the fly and partners often unable to meet face to face. "The pandemic has created a logjam of cases that are not getting to court," he said. "So arbitration is the only solution."

The six-episode series is produced by Anvil 1893 Entertainment, with O'Leary, Eric Schotz and Myeshia Muzuno executive producing along with Luke Bauer of CNBC.

A new season of Shark Tank starts on ABC Friday, Oct. 8.

O'Leary said greed is typically at the heart of financial disputes. "You'll see it on Money Court, mothers suing daughters, siblings suing each other," he said. "It makes for really remarkable TV." ●

## FOX SPORTS, SHOWTIME PUNCH UP RARE AUGUST PPV BOXING EVENTS

PACQUIAO-UGAS, JAKE PAUL EXHIBITION FIGHT LIGHT UP TYPICALLY DARK SUMMER SCHEDULE

THE PAY-PER-VIEW boxing category will look to draw some rare summertime revenue as two marquee events are slated for the typically slow month of August.

Fox Sports will distribute a Saturday, Aug. 21, fight between eight-division champion Manny Pacquiao and WBA welterweight champion Yordenis Ugas. Ugas is

a late replacement for undefeated welterweight champion Errol Spence, who pulled out of the fight after he was diagnosed with a retinal tear to his left eye.

Pacquiao is among the top PPV performers of all time. His 2015



fight with Floyd Mayweather stands as the biggest PPV event ever.

While not a traditional boxing event, Showtime's Sunday, Aug. 29 PPV event between YouTube star Jake Paul and former UFC mixed martial arts fighter Tyron Woodley is aimed at younger, non-fight fans as well as boxing aficionados. Paul's brother Logan Paul's June 6 exhibition fight against Floyd

Mayweather drew more than 1 million PPV buys, according to industry observers.

In Demand senior VP of programming and marketing Mark Boccardi said both fights could draw significant business despite falling in late summer. "There is so much pent-up demand for good, entertaining boxing events," he said.

Boccardi said the two fights are a launchpad for what is shaping up to be a busy fall PPV boxing schedule that already has an Oct. 9 Tyson Fury-Deontay Wilder III heavyweight championship fight in place. Cards featuring Canelo Alvarez and Anthony Joshua, as well as exhibitions featuring Oscar De La Hoya and Mike Tyson, are in the works, per published reports. — R. Thomas Umstead



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Panel:  
Scaling for Live Event Streaming



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Fire Side Chat: Creating  
Content for Diverse Platforms



Guest: Tara Montgomery  
Head Content Creator,  
Oprah Winfrey Specials  
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Moderator: Jamia Bigalow  
Head of Partner Marketing, Fire TV  
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Panel: Leveraging AR and VR  
in Marketing Campaigns

Breakout Sessions: Leadership for Women in Media Technology  
+ Understanding the Role Between Data and Content



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SVP, Programming Production,  
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## THE WATCHMAN

Senior content producer Michael Malone's look at the programming scene



By Michael Malone  
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### Amazon Finds 'Love' in Upstate New York

Season two of *Modern Love* premieres on Amazon Prime Video Aug. 13. There are eight episodes in this anthology series, inspired by the *New York Times* column of the same name. Minnie Driver, Kit Harington and Anna Paquin are in the cast.

The season was shot in Albany, Schenectady and Troy, New York, and internationally in London and Dublin. COVID prevented the producers from shooting in New York City, so they headed upstate.

"We couldn't get a big enough soundstage to keep the air flowing and do all the COVID protocol," said John Carney, executive producer.

COVID caused some headaches, but Carney is not complaining. "I wasn't driving a bus in Manhattan in March or April of 2020," he said, "or having [to do] a real job."

Speaking of COVID, episodes include one where Lucy Boynton and Harington play characters who meet on a train in Ireland, and promise to meet again on the train two weeks later, without exchanging numbers. Then a pandemic hits.

"I love things on trains," Carney said,



Modern Love

### King-Sized Story Behind Epix's 'Chapelwaite'

Epix premieres drama *Chapelwaite* Aug. 22.

Based on the Stephen King short story *Jerusalem's Lot*, it is about a sea captain who relocates his three children to a seemingly sleepy town in Maine after the death of his wife. The town is not so sleepy.

Executive producer Donald De Line

met with King agent Rand Holston about adapting a King yarn, and the agent suggested *Jerusalem's Lot*. "It had all the basic elements I was looking for," De Line said, including a "great setup" and "hostile terrain."

"The classic elements of a great Stephen King story," he added.

Adrien Brody, also an executive producer, plays Captain Charles Boone and Emily Hampshire portrays family governess Rebecca. De Line noted how Brody can say a lot without speaking. "He doesn't have to say many words to do a lot of storytelling," said the producer.

The 10-episode series was shot in Nova Scotia, which stands in nicely for Maine. "Someone said, let's go scout Nova Scotia, and I thought everyone had lost their minds," De Line said. "But physically, they're extremely similar. The countryside is beautiful and works so well for Maine."

That region of the world was successful in managing COVID outbreaks. The cast and crew spent quarantine time in their hotel rooms, then got to work. "It was like being in a magic bubble," De Line said. ●



Chapelwaite

## WATCH THIS ...



My Big Fat Fabulous Life

A new season of *My Big Fat Fabulous Life* starts on TLC Aug. 17. The show chronicles the life of Whitney Way Thore and her battles with her weight. The new season has her back in her North Carolina hometown and focused on her virtual fitness business. ■ *Nine Perfect Strangers* is underway on Hulu Aug. 18. Based on a book by Liane Moriarty, the series takes place at a boutique resort that promises healing, with nine city denizens checking in.



Nine Perfect Strangers

Nicole Kidman and Melissa McCarthy are in the cast ■ Aug. 20, *Paw Patrol: The Movie* hits theaters and Paramount Plus. The pups are voiced by Iain Armitage, Kim Kardashian West and Dax Shepard, among others. Also on Aug. 20, *The Greatest #AtHome Videos* returns for season two on CBS. Cedric the Entertainer hosts. ■ *Celebrity IOU: Joyride* premieres on Discovery Plus on Aug. 23. Drew and Jonathan Scott are behind this automotive makeover series.



Celebrity IOU: Joyride



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# A WHOLE DIFFERENT BALLGAME

How CBS Sports chairman Sean McManus, the *B+C/MCN* Sports Executive of the Year, rose to the challenge of production — and doing business — during the pandemic



By R. Thomas Umstead  
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**C**BS Sports chairman Sean McManus has seen and worked through just about everything in his more than four-decade career as a TV sports executive, including a 25-year run as head of CBS Sports that started in 1996.

Yet no depth of experience or executive pedigree could have prepared McManus — or the television industry for that matter — for the unprecedented pandemic that has changed the face of the sports business and the world over the past 17 months. Yet McManus and CBS Sports absorbed the pandemic's initial body blow in March 2020 and since then, he has steered the division's ship through relatively uncharted waters.

"I don't care how experienced a workforce may be, they still take their lead and any resulting calm from shifting sands from their leader," said James Brown, the Emmy-winning host of CBS's *The NFL Today*. "As part of the calm that Sean works with, he had [pandemic] plans so well-articulated, detailed and executed, that he gave all of us a sense of calm in what was a very fluid environment."

Indeed, under the tutelage of McManus — and with great focus on safety protocols for employees and on-site production adjustments — CBS aired the PGA Tour's Charles Schwab Challenge in Fort Worth, Texas, in June 2020, just three months after

COVID-19 shut down all pro sports events. In doing so CBS Sports became one of the first major TV sports distributors to offer live programming, and it would go on to televise nearly a dozen consecutive weeks of golf events that provided a sense of normalcy to a very uncertain marketplace.

"In an industry that is constantly evolving and shifting, Sean has been a constant — always thoughtful and committed — in helping us grow our business while promoting our players and tournaments and the positive impact they make in our communities," PGA Tour commissioner Jay Monahan said. "Sean McManus has been a tremendous partner and friend of the PGA Tour for



A masked crowd watches winner Dustin Johnson at the 2020 Masters golf tournament, televised by CBS.

more than 25 years at CBS and a close friend and confidant to me personally."

In March of 2021, McManus and CBS Sports focused attention on March Madness, the NCAA Division I men's college basketball tournament. CBS Sports teamed with WarnerMedia's Turner Sports to televise every game from within a bubble in Indianapolis, after the 2020 tournament was canceled due to the pandemic.

"Sean's influence on the sports media industry has been profound and I greatly value our relationship as we work in partnership on the NCAA tournament each year," WarnerMedia News & Sports chairman Jeff Zucker said.

McManus also kept his eye on the business side, expanding CBS Sports's already vast live sports rights portfolio by securing rights deals in July 2020 for the UEFA Champions League and the Europa League that are expected to drive avid soccer fans to CBS as well as Paramount Plus, parent ViacomCBS's streaming service. He also sought to reach out to new and diverse audiences with a March 2020 deal to televise National Women's Soccer League games on CBS, CBS Sports Network and Paramount Plus, to go with the company's WNBA deal for CBSN completed in 2019.

"They didn't take the pandemic as a chance to stop and hold stock; they took it as an opportunity to figure out how to grow from here," said sports analyst Lee Berke. "[McManus] had the foresight to go after content that would draw younger audiences, international audiences and tech-savvy



audiences. As a result, they've been able to integrate and exploit streaming as part of their overall sports programming offerings."

In March 2020 McManus oversaw a reported 10-year, \$2.1 billion extension of CBS's deal with the National Football League. The pact keeps the NFL on the CBS broadcast network through 2033 and provides valuable content for other ViacomCBS properties, including Paramount Plus.

As part of the deal, CBS will air the Super Bowl — the most-watched television event of the year — three times, on the heels of the network's successful presentation of a pandemic-challenged Super Bowl LV this past February.

"Sean and CBS have a love and respect for football and the NFL brand that spans decades," NFL commissioner Roger Goodell said. "Sean understands our history and our partnership and recognizes the unique and important role the NFL plays for CBS, and our entire country."

Son of the longtime ABC's *Wide World of Sports* host Jim McKay, McManus's reach and influence goes beyond the field and the bargaining table. During his run at CBS Sports, McManus has not only garnered accolades from the sports world, but also within his own ranks as a hands-on leader who values relationships with his colleagues and peers.

"He's as well-respected and as classy as anyone you'll find in the industry," CBS Sports president David Berson said. "Everything he does is with the utmost integrity, and he really prioritizes relationships, internally and with all of our partners."

Added Goodell: "Sean is always professional, and his long, successful career always provides a unique and important perspective. More than anything, what has always impressed me about Sean is his focus on our partnership. He always works to construct solutions that benefit both of us."

McManus, who also has a five-year run as CBS News president on his impressive resumé, is the 2021 *B+C Multichannel News Sports Executive of the Year*. McManus recently spoke about his decades-long run in the TV sports business, the challenges of dealing with the pandemic and the future of the sports television business in a wide-ranging interview, an edited transcript of which follows.

**B+C: When the sports industry was in the midst of the pandemic last summer, did you think that we would be where we are**



*It's been the most challenging, but also the most satisfying, run that I've ever been able to be involved in.*

— Sean McManus, chairman, CBS Sports



### today with regard to the return of live sports events?

**Sean McManus:** In early March, when sports were first stopped, we thought we might be out of the office for three months or so. Nobody thought it was going to be 14 or 15 months later that we were eventually going to be back in the office. But during the pandemic we did some remarkable television. We were the first ones to come back with major live sports coverage with the PGA Tour and in June of 2020, and we did 11 straight weeks of golf from there. It was difficult and it was costly. We have all sorts of protocols but we got it done and we were proud of what we did this year during a pandemic. We completed a full season of NFL football and college football, and we did a Super Bowl. We produced a Final Four. We did The Masters and we did hundreds of hours of live and studio programming on both CBS Sports and CBS Sports Network.

We've learned a lot of lessons — we've learned to be very agile and efficient, and we've changed the way we did a lot of our programming. In all the years I've been involved in television sports, the run that we had really starting when the pandemic began in March of 2020 to today, I think we've done some of the best work that we've ever done. And I'm as proud of the performance of the CBS team as I have been of any team that I've worked with, going back to 1977 when I started in this business at ABC. It's been the most challenging, but also the most satisfying, run that I've ever been able to be involved in.

### MCN: Let's fast-forward to today. How important is sports content to the legacy, success and future of the CBS network brand?

**SM:** Sports is playing an increasingly more important role in the world of media. It's the highest-rated programming, it's the most demographically attractive programming and, in many ways, it is what is holding the traditional pay TV ecosystem in place. When you own a television network, it's almost impossible for that network to be successful without major sports — with the NFL being the most important sport — but everything else,



**CBS Sports's Sean McManus said covering events like the 2020 Charles Schwab Challenge taught agility and efficiency. Below: winner Daniel Berger.**

including college football and basketball and golf, is also incredibly important. As we are continuing to fight to try to aggregate an audience, whether it be on streaming, direct to consumer, or whether it be on traditional television, sports is driving that distribution. It's what gives us the most leverage with the cable, telephone and satellite operators, and as we move forward with ViacomCBS, it's going to be increasingly more important. It's also the No. 1 driver of sign-ups and retention for Paramount Plus, which is an enormously important priority for ViacomCBS. So, sports are going to continue to be important. It's why we completed the recent NFL deal that we did, which will take us into the next decade. You do not want to have a broadcast network without NFL football.

**MCN: Let's talk about the new NFL deal. The content distribution landscape has changed since CBS's previous NFL deal was struck. How does the new NFL deal reflect the market changes going forward and will we ever see exclusive NFL games on Paramount Plus?**

**SM:** Well, already the NFL is carried on the [Paramount Plus] main and

less-expensive tier, so the NFL already plays a really important part on Paramount Plus. But I don't foresee right now a scenario where there's a lot of other NFL content or exclusive NFL content on Paramount Plus, but the door is always open. We're committed to working with our partners at the NFL and with our affiliates to make sure that we protect the exclusivity in every market, but also hopefully find ways to expand that distribution onto Paramount Plus, but there are no plans right now. The exclusivity is still a very important element for all of our affiliates and all of our owned-and-operated stations.

Quite frankly, the broad distribution is important to us and to the NFL. I've often said one of the reasons the NFL remained so popular is that it is so broadly distributed. Every NFL game is seen live in the home markets, even when the games are on ESPN; the two markets that are involved in the game have those over-the-air broadcast rights in the individual markets. So the broad distribution is still driving the business for us.

### MCN: Will we see sports offerings similar to last year's NFL game on Nickelodeon across other ViacomCBS brands?

**SM:** I will say that we're a very different company than we were when we were just CBS. We had a great portfolio of events, but we weren't able to program them and promote them and brand them as effectively as we are now with the incredible assets that ViacomCBS has.

The Nickelodeon game is a great example of that. We did a separate telecast in the late afternoon wildcard game last year, which was met with unbelievably rave reviews. It was enjoyed by older fans and younger fans alike. I think that's just the beginning of scratching the surface of how we can use the various ViacomCBS platforms to really take better advantage of the great sports properties that we have. When you look at the promotional opportunities, whether it's to young kids on Nickelodeon, or whether it's to a slightly older audience on a VH1 or MTV, or to an African-American audience on BET, we have remarkable assets that I think are going to enable us to be even more aggressive in the sports marketplace going forward.

**MCN: CBS Sports has aggressively pursued international soccer rights, including the UEFA Champions League. How do those rights fit into a**





### broader multiplatform strategy?

**SM:** A couple of things — one, we want Paramount Plus to be a must-have for the soccer fan in this country, and I think we are a long way towards that goal. That includes the UEFA Champions League; Serie A; the U.S. soccer games that we have rights to; the Brazilian Soccer League, where we have rights; and CONCACAF, where we have rights. If you're a soccer fan and in this country, you're pretty frustrated if you don't have Paramount Plus. It shows up in the numbers in terms of signups and retention. It's been a remarkably successful strategy in retaining and attracting audiences to Paramount Plus.

Could I see us finding other sports that would serve that role on Paramount Plus? I do, but the soccer audience is in some ways uniquely complimentary to Paramount Plus. It's a young, very diverse avid soccer fan who will find some big-time prestigious soccer programming on Paramount Plus. So we're very happy with the results of our international soccer properties, and it's going to remain a high priority of ours going forward.

### MCN: Also in your portfolio are women's sports with the WNBA and National Women's Soccer League. What value does women's sports offer to a live sports distribution company like CBS Sports?

**SM:** We want to have as wide a funnel as we possibly can, and women's sports fits into that strategy. The NWSL and the WNBA are very important for us. We're the only network that does a female-hosted and produced talk show, *We Need To Talk*, which airs regularly, both on the CBS broadcast network and CBSN. So it's part of our strategy to be a full-service organization that attracts a large and diverse group of sports fans, including young people, older people, men and women — we're trying to appeal to everybody and I think it's working. We've been very strategic in the way we've gone about this plan and it's really showing dividends right now. People are starting to notice the aggressiveness that we have in our programming across all of our platforms.

### MCN: In terms of on-air talent, how important is diversity in front of and behind the camera from your perspective?

**SM:** It's critical. We want our on-air talent to reflect the population of America. We've done a good job so far, but we have a lot more work to do



for sure. I'm proud of the fact that we have some amazing female talent across all of our sports, whether it's golf with [CBS golf reporter] Amanda Balionis or football and basketball with [sideline reporter] Tracy Wolfson. [CBS Sports reporter] A.J. Ross is terrific, as is [We Need To Talk co-host] Katrina Adams — I could go down the list of women who really are fantastic broadcasters. We've made a lot of progress in the area of black on-air talent, for our shows and we're well-represented, whether it's JB (James Brown), who I think is the best studio host in America; Nate Burleson, who has been an enormous success on the NFL Today show; Charles Davis, now our No. 2 NFL game analyst; Greg Gumbel, who is the first Black man ever to call a Super Bowl and still has a prominent position at CBS Sports. I say that to say that we've made some progress but we have to do a better job going forward.

### MCN: CBS Sports over the past year or so has been aggressive in securing deals for live sports content, but recently you walked away from a potential IndyCar deal. What was it about that property that didn't allow it to fit into CBS Sports' portfolio?

**SM:** I love IndyCar racing. I grew up working on the Indy 500 and I was very involved with CART (Championship Auto Racing Teams) when it was launched on NBC in the early 1980s. We simply didn't have room in our programming schedule for it. We have so much golf, college basketball and other programming that we just couldn't find the windows on broadcast television that were necessary to do the deal. We never really even ended up talking economics or any other elements only because we just didn't have the

**CBS covered the Tampa Bay Buccaneers defeating the Kansas City Chiefs before a socially distanced crowd at Super Bowl LV.**

space for it. We're committed to golf, as an example, on the weekend of the Indy 500 — we just can't pre-empt our golf schedule because it's a programming obligation we have.

I had a couple of really nice conversations with [retired race car driver] Roger Penske who is a good friend who I've known since the early 1980s. It just wasn't a deal that we could accommodate from a programming standpoint.

I am very excited about SRX [Superstar Racing Experience], our primetime series that recently concluded. It was met with rave reviews in the racing community. The drivers love it, and the shows were incredibly well-produced. It marked the first time that we've done major live car racing in a couple of decades, and it worked out really well for us. So we're excited.

### MCN: We talked a little about televising sports during the pandemic. How difficult was it to make the necessary adjustments from a production standpoint while negotiating the many date changes that pro sports leagues were forced to make due to the pandemic?

**SM:** It was remarkable. We had to do a Masters in November — no one had ever seen the course on television in November. We had to work out a deal with the NFL to clear out a window early in the afternoon for The Masters, but it was so much fun. Since we knew we weren't going to have any patrons, we were able to introduce some new technology that just blew people away.



The fly cam on the 16th hole showed not only the 16th hole in a way that had never been seen before, but it also showed the relationship between the 15th green and the 16th hole. We had live drones flying around which, again, showed the course as it's never been seen before.

After The Masters we went into the Super Bowl, which is one of the most difficult events to produce to begin with just because of the magnitude of it. Then we had to socially distance everything from our edit suites to our studios. We built a little city in Tampa, but it was built to the specifications of a pandemic, which was incredibly complicated. It took a lot of space, and money. Our control trucks and our mobile units had to be totally reconfigured again, and you're not talking about two or three mobile units... you're talking about numerous mobile units for videotape and audio and everything else. But we made it work. The only thing we didn't get was a really good, exciting, thrilling game. It didn't live up to expectations—if you were to ask at the beginning of the year what matchup you wanted to see in the Super Bowl, it would have featured Tom Brady and Patrick Mahomes. That's what we got, but unfortunately, we didn't get a close game, but the production was remarkable.

Then we went into the college basketball season and the NCAA men's basketball tournament, which was obviously contested all in Indianapolis. Again, very stringent safety protocols for both CBS and Turner Sports, and it came off without a hitch. We had a bubble that was effective and safe for our production people and our announcers and management personnel. The [Final Four] semifinal games were as good a semifinals as we've ever seen. Once again, the championship game, unfortunately, didn't live up to expectations. I worry about things I can control, and everything that we could have controlled in the NCAA men's tournament and the Super Bowl I couldn't be more proud of. And then we went down the following week to Augusta National with our 50 mobile units and all the different feeds. In terms of complexity of production, The Masters is probably the most complex.

**MCN: How do you see CBS Sports evolving now as we move closer to some sense of normalcy within the TV sports industry?**

**SM:** I think our strategy and our goal is to make sure that our content can be consumed anyway the customer wants to consume it. If he wants to watch it on broadcast television, he can do that; if he or



#FINAL FOUR CBS NCAA.com

**CBS Sports and partner Turner Sports faced up to the challenge of covering March Madness (top r.) in the Indianapolis bubble. At left: announcers Jim Nantz, Grant Hill and Bill Raftery.**

she wants to watch it on a streaming service, they can do that with Paramount Plus. If somebody wants to do it on a laptop or an iPad we want to make sure they can watch it on that platform also. So making sure that we're reaching as much of the audience as we can is a high priority of ours. There's no higher priority at ViacomCBS right now than Paramount Plus, and we're going to continue to invest in sports to grow that platform. It's also incredibly important for us to reach the widest possible audience that we can, and broadcast television is still the best way to do that. We are big believers in broadcast television—we think it's a really good business from a financial standpoint and a programming standpoint. The NFL likes being on America's most-watched network, as does the NCAA, the PGA Tour and PGA Championship. So we need to be a full-service broadcast network that is also reaching what is generally a younger and more diverse audience on different kinds of platforms. We're trying to thread the needle. The most revenue is still coming from broadcast television, with the sale of commercial units and sponsorships, but that's beginning to tip a little bit also, the other platforms are quickly catching up.

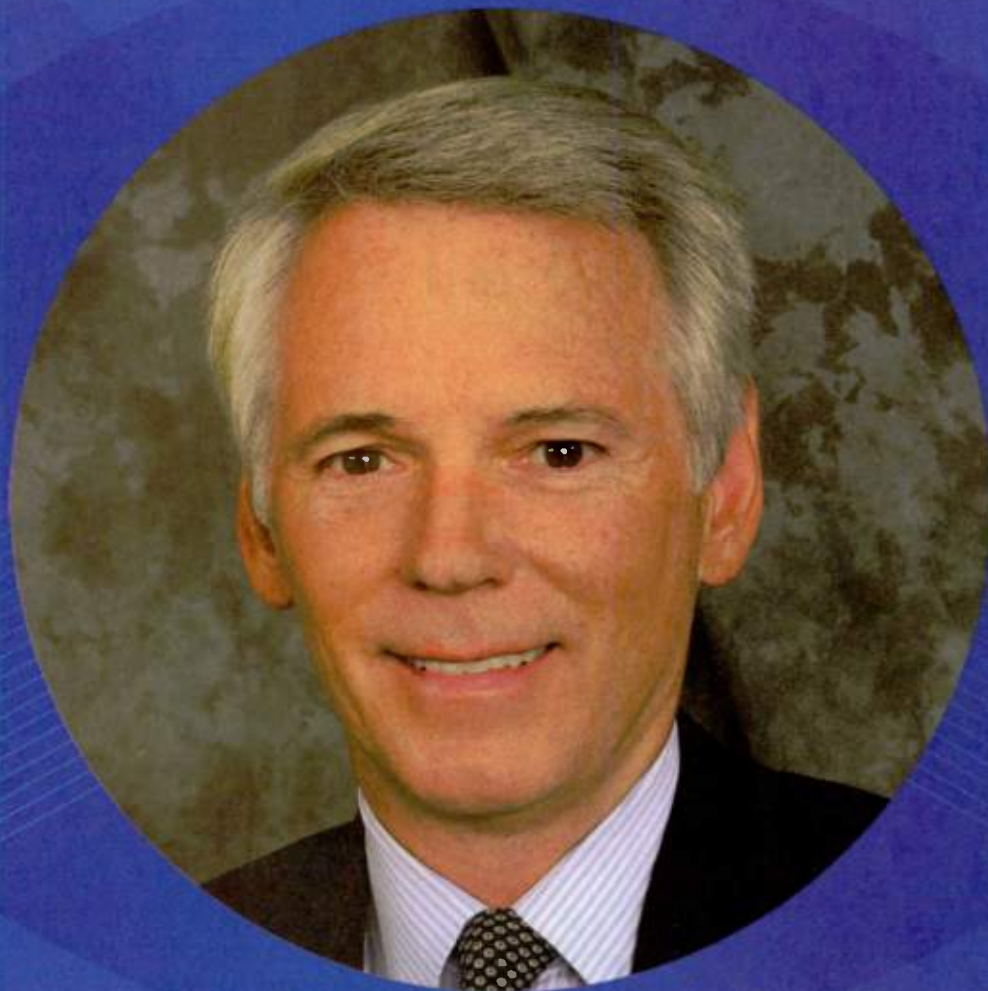
**MCN: Is there room in that distribution model for CBS Sports Network? One of the network's cable sports competitors, NBCSN, is shutting down after this year. How does CBSN fit into the overall business strategy?**

**SM:** It's a great companion to the broadcast network. I'm proud of the programming we put on there. We have resisted spending hundreds of millions of dollars in rights for major sports properties, but we have excellent programming whether it's college basketball, college football the WNBA, some of UEFA games or other soccer programming. Studio programming is very successful for us—it gives us a live presence five days a week. So we're fully committed to CBS Sports Network, and I think our strategy is the right one, which is to gradually improve the quality of the events which we are doing on a regular basis.

**MCN: If we're sitting here a year from now talking about the TV sports industry, does it look more like 2020 or 2019?**

**SM:** I think a lot of that depends on what happens to the country with respect to the pandemic, but all the arrows that I see are pointing up toward a return to normality. I can't predict what's going to happen with the virus: I'm hoping that the widespread vaccinations will continue so that we can really get a handle on moving forward in a regular way. So I think a year from now I'm hoping and I'm confident that we are going to be much, much closer to the way we'd been traditionally with our CBS Sports productions across all of our platforms. ●





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**CBS SPORTS**



# Kelly Kahl Has His Eye on the Fall

Double the excitement from last season, CBS Entertainment president says, as production heads back to normalcy



By Michael Malone  
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**K**elly Kahl, CBS Entertainment president, has overseen the network's prime schedule for many years. Last season was unique, with COVID-19 causing all sorts of production delays. But 2021-2022 is starting to feel much more like a traditional TV season.

"We just feel like we're headed toward a much bigger, better fall than we had last year," said Kahl.

Kahl spoke with B+C/Multichannel News about CBS's fall season, which includes spinoffs of CSI, NCIS and FBI, and

what the traditional broadcast schedule represents in this era of on-demand viewing. The interview was edited for space and clarity.

**B+C: Years back, you likened the days just before the season starts to a football player in a locker room, ready to go. Does it still feel like that in this time of streaming?**

**Kelly Kahl:** The excitement is still there. It's probably twice as much this year. Taking the analogy further, it feels like we'll be playing in front of a full stadium this year. It feels like we're gonna have a full team on the field. We've got new franchises or new editions of some of our franchises, NCIS: Hawaii, FBI:

*The Equalizer, starring Queen Latifah, drew in strong viewership for CBS during the pandemic.*

International and CSI: Vegas. It just feels like our lineup is strengthened — each night of the week, we're strong. It really feels like we have a renewed, energized lineup. The reaction from advertisers has been terrific. We had a terrific upfront.

It feels like a real game again.

**B+C: What is the thinking behind the spinoffs for NCIS, FBI and CSI?**

**KK:** The audience is receptive to these shows. They like them, they continue to watch them through thick and thin. Business-wise, they're very smart for us. They travel well internationally, they sell well domestically. They're good sources of streams and subscribers for Paramount Plus.

**B+C: Tell me how CSI: Vegas came to be.**

**KK:** It was the right producers and the right idea, and being able to get Billy [Petersen] and Jorja [Fox] back was huge as well. We expect that to be a hook for viewers to come back to see — a couple of very, very popular characters in TV history.

**B+C: Will it feel similar or much different from the original CSI?**

**KK:** I think the answer is yes. [Laughs.] If you liked CSI in the past, you'll see the same excitement, the same characters, the same wry humor. But we're also very cognizant that TV has moved on in the last few years. Things that were new at the time when CSI came on, the close-ups and the visual effects, those are almost customary now. The producers understood they have to update the way the show looks to make it look very contemporary and, hopefully, like the original CSI, maybe a little ahead of its time.

**B+C: Were there many COVID-related hiccups for this coming season?**

**KK:** Nothing yet, and I'm knocking on wood as I say that. We were probably very lucky last year. Like anybody else,



we had minor hiccups here and there, but we didn't have any major shutdowns. As we head to fall, we're feeling pretty good about green lights for all our shows. We're still in COVID but shows have had a year to learn how to handle that.

**B+C: What have you learned as a programmer across the past 16 months?**

**KK:** No matter what is going on in the country, and I don't want to minimize the difficult time we've all had, people want to be entertained. They'll react and respond to good product, no matter what difficulties the country is facing. We were incredibly gratified to see something like *The Equalizer* take off last year. People really reacted to that show in the middle of the country's difficulties.

**B+C: How do you work with Paramount Plus to get the most out of the shows you oversee?**

**KK:** We tend to look holistically as a company now. Our shows are very popular not only on CBS but on Paramount Plus. We have to be a little more agnostic as to where people watch the shows. We love when they watch on CBS, but if they watch on Paramount Plus or even the CBS app, that's fine with us as well. We monetize it either way. We have to be supportive of anywhere people want to see them.

**B+C: Has the streaming age affected the way producers produce CBS shows?**

**KK:** It has informed producers in the sense that they are competing with streaming shows, not just shows on ABC, NBC and Fox. They're competing with everything. The more shows out there, the better shows are, our producers feel they need to be



**Kelly Kahl's fall plans for CBS include (clockwise from top l.): an Emmys hosted by Cedric the Entertainer, a return for *Survivor* and a reboot for *CSI*.**



right there. They've had to raise their game up.

**B+C: What's in store for the new season of *Survivor*?**

**KK:** After a tough year without it, we're excited to have it back on the schedule in the fall. They've completed two seasons and a lot of credit goes to Jeff [Probst] and the crew and producers, because it wasn't an easy thing to produce, a show in the middle of the South Pacific during a pandemic. They worked tirelessly to get the show back. We've not seen a lot yet but from what we've heard, we're going to be very happy with the results.

**B+C: What does Cedric the Entertainer bring to the Emmys as host?**

**KK:** He's going to bring a lot

of humor. They don't call him The Entertainer for nothing. There's a terrific Everyman quality that he brings, not only to his sitcom [*The Neighborhood*] but he'll bring to the Emmys as well. He represents performers, he represents the people in the room. He's also very accessible for the audience watching.

**B+C: What makes the traditional schedule important in 2021?**

**KK:** When you get off to a strong start in the fall you can carry the momentum the rest of the season. Last year we were certainly gratified to get our shows up and going, but they came at different times. As glad as I was to have them on, it was hard to get momentum because of the difficulties in production.

This feels like a fresh start. If we get off as strong as we hope to, we can ride the wave for the entire season. ●



# Familiarity Breeds Audience For Kids-Show Reboots

Networks turn to old favorites to draw in young viewers and their folks



By R. Thomas Umstead  
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Children's-targeted programmers such as Disney Channel and Nickelodeon are rebooting popular kids shows from the 1990s and early 2000s in an effort to reach a new generation of kids, as well as their parents who grew up watching them on both traditional television and online streaming platforms.

Shows with brand identity and familiarity have an advantage over new programs trying to establish themselves in a crowded multiplatform content universe, network executives and industry observers said. But such advantages don't guarantee success for reboots, regardless of the original show's popularity.

"If you can provide an entertaining show to the current audience and use established characters in an established format that also attracts past viewers, then you're on the right track," TV analyst Bill Carroll said. "Yet in any show, whether it's a reboot or an original, it has to stand on its own, whether it's entertaining or whether the audience finds it attractive."

As young viewers consume content across multiple platforms — kids 2 to 11 averaged 14 hours as week of viewing on connected-TV devices and 10 hours of live or time shifted TV viewing according to Nielsen's Total Audience Report for third-quarter 2020 — content distributors are turning to more established intellectual properties (IP) to reach more kids, as well as their parents who grew up with such properties.



"It absolutely helps break through the clutter and connect to audiences," Paul DeBenedittis, Nickelodeon's executive VP of programming and content strategy, said. "We have the ability to bring back properties so that parents who are now 40 years old can experience Nick with their children."

## Aggressive IP Revivers

Nickelodeon in particular has been aggressive in developing reboots and spinoffs for its older titles, having brought back this past May animated series *Rugrats* with new episodes featuring the original actor voices from the 1990s. On the live-action front, the network in June revived its 2010 series *iCarly*, featuring the original kid stars Miranda Cosgrove and Nathan Kress reprising their roles as adults.

Both shows debuted on upstart streaming service Paramount Plus and not Nickelodeon, where the original shows ran. DeBenedittis said the streaming service allows the network to reach both fans who watch reruns of the

original series on Paramount Plus as well as new viewers who may not be familiar with the franchise but are viewing other shows online.

The strategy seems to be working. The *iCarly* reboot, whose June 17 debut reached 145,000 households within the live-plus-three-day window according to Samba TV, was recently renewed for a second season on Paramount Plus.

"We have an opportunity to reach a broader audience that might not be watching Nick and might not have children, but they're watching Paramount Plus to see a title that they grew up with," DeBenedittis said. "These titles generally have a strong affinity with audiences while at the same time they also have the ability to drive new audiences."

Disney Channel is preparing to revive one of its more popular animated titles, *The Proud Family*, with hopes it will follow in the footsteps of successful reboots of *That's So Raven* (*Raven's Home*) and *High School Musical* (*High School Musical: The Musical*).

*The Proud Family: Louder and Prouder* will once again follow the exploits of an African-American family, led by teenage daughter Penny Proud. Original series creator and executive producers Bruce Smith and Ralph Farquhar will return for the reboot along with most of the cast members from the original show, which aired on Disney Channel from 2001 to 2005. Though no premiere date for *The Proud Family: Louder and Prouder* has been announced, it will be available on Disney Plus.

Disney Branded Television president and CEO Gary Marsh said the multigenerational appeal of reboots provides a catalyst for co-viewing

Shows featuring grown-up kids' stars like *Disney's Raven's Home* (top) and *iCarly* on *Paramount Plus* appeal to children and their parents.





opportunities on multiple platforms. “There is a familiarity with the series among original fans, but the show has new stories to tell and new characters to introduce that will keep the original fans engaged and attract new ones,” Marsh said.

Marsh pointed to the success of Disney Channel’s *Raven’s Home*, which finished its fourth season this past May as one of the network’s most-watched and most co-viewed shows. The series starring Raven-Symoné takes place years after the end of *That’s So Raven*, which ran on the channel from 2003 to 2007, with Raven’s then-teenage character now a divorced mother of preteen twins.

“When *Raven’s Home* first launched, the nostalgia factor of seeing Raven-Symoné in her comedic element again appealed to fans of *That’s So Raven*, while attracting a whole new generation of fans in Disney Channel’s core 6-14 demo,” Marsh said. “What’s great about these titles is that they’re multigenerational and are great for co-viewing.”

The CW will look to capitalize on the success and popularity of Craig McCracken-produced Cartoon Network’s animated series *The Powerpuff Girls*, having green-lit a live-action version of the series. In The CW’s version, the three adolescent superheroes of the animated series that ran on Cartoon Network from 1998 to 2005 and again from 2016 to 2019, are 20-something women contemplating their roles as crime fighters.

Carroll said reboots of kids-targeted shows such as Netflix’s *Fuller House* (based on ABC’s 1980’s sitcom *Full House*) have succeeded because the new series are able to update the original version to appeal to new viewers without totally alienating former viewers looking for the nostalgia of the original show. *Fuller House*, in



Nickelodeon animated series *Rugrats* got a reboot on streamer Paramount Plus.

which the kid stars from the original are now adults and drive the main storylines, ran for five seasons from 2016 to 2020.

“Time and time again it has been proven that if a reboot is well-done and it makes sense, then it works,” Carroll said. “If it’s just taking a concept that worked before and is not contemporized then it probably doesn’t work.”

Indeed, not every reboot idea successfully sees the light of day. Disney in 2019 announced plans for a revival of the 2000s Disney Channel series *Lizzie McGuire*, with original series star Hilary Duff reprising her lead role as an adult living in New York. But in a 2020 Instagram post Duff announced that the show would not go forward, saying that the “stars didn’t align” creatively for the much-anticipated reboot.

Disney’s Marsh acknowledged the challenges in navigating actors, storylines and characters surrounding reboots. “It’s important to honor the heart and soul of the original series because it obviously holds a special place in the hearts of the fans,” Marsh said. “But it’s equally important to evolve and contemporize the characters and storytelling so that we invite new audiences in as well. With every project you start out to make, sometimes the stars align and other times they don’t and that’s OK.”

### New ‘Under Wraps’ In Works

Disney is moving head with several other projects in the reboot arena, including a comedic remake of the network’s first ever original movie, *Under Wraps*, and a *Doogie Howser M.D.* reimagining featuring *Andi Mack*’s Peyton Elizabeth Lee as a 16-year-old prodigy juggling a budding medical career and life as a teen, according to Marsh.

Nickelodeon is putting a new spin on the classic animated series *The Smurfs*, and a live-action reboot of 2000s animated series *The Fairly Odd Parents* is also in the works, DeBenedittis said. Other franchises such as *Star Trek*, *Transformers* and the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* are also being primed for new projects.

“We’re looking at additional content — both movies and series — that we could potentially deliver for the fan base and grow new audiences through both linear and streaming,” he said. “The different platforms offer us the ability to drive broader reach and engagement with beloved properties that fans love as well as introduce kids to these properties.” ●



REVIEW

## RESERVATION DOGS

(Started Monday, Aug. 9, on FX on Hulu)

*RESERVATION DOGS* IS a dark comedy set on a reservation in rural Oklahoma. Four Native-American teens are desperate to relocate to a magical land known as California, and embark on small-time crime to fund their voyage.

Bear, Elora, Willie Jack and Cheese are the teens, two boys and two girls. The series starts with a bang, the Stooges’ “I Wanna Be Your Dog” cranking from a radio as the four eye a snack truck they intend to steal.

D’Pharaoh Woon-A-Tai, Devery Jacobs, Paulina Alexis and Lane Factor play the teens. Woon-A-Tai’s character Bear, with long hair and a contemplative nature, is compelling as the gang’s self-proclaimed leader.

The second episode is set at a reservation health clinic and will ensure the viewer never again complains about their own substandard experience at the doctor’s office.

Zahn McClarnon, who *Fargo* fans will remember as Gerhardt family enforcer Hanzee, plays an inept reservation police officer.

*Reservation Dogs* offers an intriguing look at life on the reservation. It’s a bleak landscape, with cracked pavement, rusting industrial gear and meth-heads mixed in with the decent citizens. Bright spots are hard to come by.

Filmed in Oklahoma, the show is executive produced by Sterlin Harjo (who tapped his experiences growing up as a Native American in the state), Taika Waititi and Garrett Basch. *Reservation Dogs* is a unique, impactful and darkly funny series that depicts the desperation, and occasional glimmers of hope, experienced by teens on the reservation. Full of style, it offers captivating characters who at times leap off the gritty terrain. — Michael Malone



# Denver Stations Show Mile-High Growth

Lots of news options in booming Colorado capital, which keeps all the stations in hustle mode



By Michael Malone  
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Denver hosted the Major League Baseball All-Star Game July 13, with the game's best showing their stuff at Coors Field. It was also a chance for Denver to show its stuff to the rest of America. "This year especially, it was a coming out party for Colorado," said KCNC VP and general manager Walt DeHaven, "as we come out of the pandemic."

The All-Star game was shifted from Atlanta to Denver as a response to new voting laws in Georgia that many voting rights activists oppose. The game "was a big deal for the city, a big deal for the

market, and a big deal for Fox, because it aired on our channel," said Byron Grandy, VP/general manager, KDVR-KWGN.

The American League dominates the annual mid-summer showdown, and KUSA dominates the news battles in DMA No. 16. Tegna owns NBC affiliate KUSA and MyNetworkTV station KTVD. CBS holds KCNC. Scripps owns ABC outlet KMGH and independent KCDO and Nexstar has Fox affiliate KDVR and CW outlet KWGN. Telemundo station KDEN is part of NBCUniversal Local and Entravision-owned KCEC carries Univision.

Comcast is the major pay TV operator in Denver.

KUSA easily won the 6-7 a.m. race in households and viewers 25-54 from January through July 19, and took 5 and 6 p.m. news by a comfortable margin. At 10

p.m., KUSA averaged a 4.45 in households from January to July 19, ahead of KCNC's 3.13, KMGH's 2.23, KDVR's 1.92, KCEC's 1.15 and KDEN's 0.57. In the late news demo race, KUSA scored a 1.81, KCEC a 1.03, KDVR a 1.00, KCNC a 0.86, KMGH a 0.63 and KDEN a 0.44.

Mark Cornetta, president and general manager of KUSA-KTVD, said strong competition keeps 9News staffers hustling. "It's a pretty high bar in Denver for producing local news," he said. "It keeps everyone on their toes. We're not one to sit back and rest on our legacy and assume we'll be the top station moving forward. We always try to come at it like, we have to work harder because we have such good competitors."

Cornetta also oversees Tegna stations in Little Rock, Portland and Sacramento.

In February, KUSA launched 9News En Español, hiring a bilingual digital producer and meteorologist for Spanish-language news on KUSA's streaming platform. "The growing number of Latino and Latina viewers is not something to ignore," Cornetta said.

On the Spanish-language side, KDEN has launched a daily midday newscast, accessible on the station's digital platforms as well as on Apple TV and Roku. "We are

**The 9News photojournalists are ready for action outside of KUSA Denver headquarters.**





meeting consumers on their preferred platforms and can accompany them anywhere they go, at any time of day," said Tatiana Arguello, president and general manager of Telemundo Denver.

KMGH acquired independent KCDO for around \$9 million last year, then launched morning, 1 p.m. and 8 p.m. daily newscasts on the indie. The station is branded Local 3. "It has kept us busy, but it's been a great addition to our portfolio," Dean Littleton, KMGH-KCDO VP and general manager, said.

KCDO represents yet another news player in Denver. "When you include our independent and the Spanish-language stations, nine stations are doing news," said Littleton. "That's quite a bit of competition, which is good for viewers."

With additional hiring on the KCDO side, Scripps is looking for a new Denver headquarters for the two stations.

DeHaven retired July 30 (see sidebar). With previous stints at CBS properties in Boston and Chicago, he described Denver as "the best TV community I ever worked in."

KCNC launched CBSN Denver in February 2020, right before the pandemic became major news. The streaming platform features anchored programming, coverage of live breaking news and a library of local news content that is available on demand. "Sadly, it couldn't have happened at a better time," said DeHaven. "People were craving the information and we were able to offer it in that way."

KDVR added a 10:30 p.m. nightly news, now going 9 to 11 p.m. with local product. KWGN has a 4:30 to 9 a.m. newscast, another at 4 p.m. and an hour at 7 p.m. "There's just a good appetite in this market for local news," said Grandy.

Denver moved from DMA No. 17 to 16 in the past year. Littleton worked in sales at KUSA in 2008 and 2009 before coming on board as KMGH general manager early in 2017. Upon his return, he was struck by the growth in Denver. These days, he notes cranes tickling the sky in every direction. "It's amazing how much the city has grown in a short period of time," he said.



*When you include our independent and the Spanish-language stations, nine stations are doing news. That's quite a bit of competition, which is good.*

— **Dean Littleton,**  
VP and general manager, KMGH-KCDO

The stations are eager to connect with the new arrivals. KCDO debuted talk show *The Kathie J Show* Aug. 2. Littleton described the program, hosted by a local radio personality, as "an energetic sort of show focused on local issues," with "positive, inspiring stories."

DeHaven said more news may be coming to KCNC in the fall, with a focus on weekends.

KDVR connects with users on the move through streaming platform Fox31 Now.

KDEN redesigned its app recently for iPhone and Android users, offering real-time weather alerts in Spanish. KDEN launched its news out of KUSA's facility years ago, but has since moved out. The stations still share what Cornetta called "an editorial relationship."

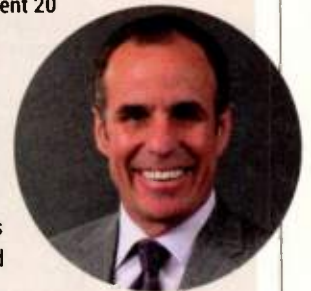
KUSA has a new content initiative called Voices of Change, which seeks out the stories of the underserved members of the community. "We decided to invite voices from the community in," said Cornetta. "That's what Voices of Change is all about."

Denver's many new arrivals are drawn to the market's physical beauty, which includes easy access to the Rockies, and a wide range of cultural offerings, including live music and a dynamic restaurant scene. "It's really outdoorsy and there's lots of stuff to do," Littleton said. "The city has a lot going for it. I can see why so many people move here."

Cornetta described Denver as "a big city with a small-town feel" — a cosmopolitan vibe, but a place where residents are eager to help their neighbor. He added, "It's a city where people are involved and engaged." ●

## KCNC GM DEHAVEN RETIRES

WALT DEHAVEN, VP and general manager of KCNC Denver, retired as of July 30. He spent 20 years atop the CBS-owned station, and 14 more with other stations in the group, including ones in Chicago and Boston.



DeHaven said his plan is to "leave things in as good a shape as I can, then get out of the way." He'll stay in the Denver market and will remain active in various nonprofits, including music-education organization Take Note Colorado.

No successor has been named.

Asked about career highlights, DeHaven responded that the biggest, most memorable stories are often tragedies, and not exactly highlights. He mentioned seeing the KCNC team coalesce amidst wildfires and mass shootings. "The very worst brings out the very best in the people in our organization, in our community," he said.

Mark Cornetta, KUSA's president and general manager, called DeHaven "a great partner," whether it was educating the market on the digital transition in 2009, or on the four-station helicopter share. "Walt is a great competitor and I'll be sorry to see him go," said Cornetta.

DeHaven said his 20 years at the station, and 40 in the business, seemed like nice, round numbers to end on. "I loved my time in the business," he said. "It just seemed right." — MM



# Marketers Roll Up Sleeves As Shows Prep for Premiere

## 'Nick Cannon,' 'You Bet Your Life' kicking off in September



By Paige Albiniak  
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With the Delta variant surging, nothing is back to normal, but syndicated productions are giving it their best shot. Debmarm-Mercury's Nick Cannon and Fox's *You Bet Your Life*, starring Jay Leno, are debuting in September, and veteran shows, such as NBCUniversal's Kelly Clarkson, are returning to live-in-studio audiences.

To promote the shows, marketers are touching all bases — on-air, online and outdoor — to get the word out.

After a one-year delay, Debmarm-Mercury is preparing to launch a new daytime talk show, *Nick Cannon*, with the Fox Television Stations as the launch group in major markets. The show was supposed to launch in fall 2020 but was put off due to the difficulties of mounting production during the pandemic and due to a brief scandal that erupted after people felt Cannon made anti-Semitic comments on his YouTube podcast. Those comments caused Cannon to almost be relegated into the "canceled" category, but he quickly rehabilitated himself after meeting with leaders of Jewish groups and with the companies that aired his shows. Last fall, Debmarm-Mercury started shopping the show again and it didn't take long to get it back on track.

Fox stood by Cannon throughout, retaining the multiplatform performer and producer as the host of the network's top-rated singing competition series, *The Masked Singer*. Debmarm-Mercury wanted



to appeal to the baked-in *Masked Singer* fan base for the first round of promos produced for TV stations.

"The first phase was just to capture *The Masked Singer* audience," Adam Lewis, senior VP, marketing, Lionsgate-owned Debmarm-Mercury, said. "This is a guy who is in your living room already, he's not some random name you've never heard of. This is a guy you know."

### A Known Quantity

Most viewers have probably heard of Nick Cannon. If not via *The Masked Singer*, then through one of his many other gigs, including eight seasons of hosting NBC's *America's Got Talent*, 15 seasons of hosting and producing improv comedy sketch series *Wild 'N Out* on ViacomCBS's MTV and VH1 and hosting his own syndicated morning radio show, among other things.

Debmarm-Mercury sent that first round of *Masked Singer*-focused spots to Fox affil-

iates at the end of May, and then expanded them for non-Fox-affiliated stations to include *America's Got Talent* and *Wild 'N Out*.

"Phase two was less about where you've seen him before and more about what we're going to do with the show," Lewis said. "We want to show everything he is capable of doing, which includes comedy, music and talk. The show is going to be fun, funny, energetic and inspiring. It doesn't have to fall into any one category."

Around Labor Day, Debmarm-Mercury will start providing stations with tune-in messaging for the show, which premieres Monday, Sept. 27.

"In the coming weeks, I'd love to connect all of these elements to our set but we have to wait a little bit before we can do that," Lewis said. The *Nick Cannon* production team really gets to work in the studio after Labor Day on Monday, Sept. 6.

In the meantime, Cannon is active across all of his social media platforms, pushing promos for the show on his established YouTube, Instagram and Facebook channels and his growing presence on TikTok, a platform on which Cannon is focused.

"You can't launch a show in this day and age without having a robust digital platform," Lewis said. "Whether it's clips, the whole episode, behind-the-scenes bonuses — you have to be able to service that digital audience. They are there, they are looking for content and that's monetizable. Nick has a very big digital footprint and we will be harnessing all of that. Our ability to talk to those fans directly is our best way to market this show."

Nick Cannon will be taped in front of a live audience at Harlem's NEP Metro-

**Jay Leno is making the rounds on Zoom to promote his upcoming revival of *You Bet Your Life*.**



lis Studios at 106th and Park. All audience members will be required to show proof of vaccination prior to attending, which is becoming the norm for live TV audiences with *Drew Barrymore*, Kelly Clarkson and Wendy Williams following the same protocol along with the late-night shows such as *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert* and *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon*.

New York City also is requiring people to show proof of vaccination before they will be allowed to enter indoor venues — including restaurants, bars and theaters — starting in September, so asking people to do the same before sitting in an audience will be the rule in New York. Los Angeles has made no such designation yet but it has mandated that people wear masks indoors.

### Betting on Leno

Nick Cannon is one of only two new shows to premiere in syndication this fall and both of them will air on the Fox Television Stations. Jay Leno and his former *Tonight Show* band leader, Kevin Eubanks, are starring in a reboot of *You Bet Your Life*, which was famously hosted by Groucho Marx on radio and television from 1949 to 1960.

Fox started airing three sets of prelaunch spots for *You Bet Your Life* in June featuring Leno and Eubanks bantering back and forth. Those spots are running on stations throughout the summer.

Come September, once game footage is in the can, Fox will send out spots that “actually show the show,” Stephen Brown, executive VP of programming and development, Fox Television stations, said.

“We’ll show you the set, the game play and what the feel of the show is,” Brown said. “It’s a comedy show with a lot of game.”

Throughout the summer, Leno is doing satellite media tours and appearing on stations via Zoom “not only to drive awareness about the need for contestants, but just of the show in general,” Brown said.



*If we learned anything during COVID, it’s to present the reality to your audience and be real about where you are. This too shall pass.*

— Alex Duda, executive producer, *Kelly Clarkson*

Fox also has the benefit of owning its stations, simplifying the process of booking Leno on morning shows to hype the new program.

Fox also plans to bring back outdoor buys for *You Bet Your Life* and for veteran shows *Divorce Court*, *Dish Nation* and *25 Words or Less*. Those campaigns will feature bus and subway buys in New York and likely some buys in Los Angeles, Brown said.

Like Cannon, having a live audience is important to *You Bet Your Life*, so it will also be taped in front of an entirely vaccinated live studio audience.

“The audience is mostly there to provide energy, laughter and applause. Because it’s a comedy show, you don’t want to fake that,” Brown said.

Also preparing to return in front of a

**A handful of virtual audience members will remain when live audiences return to Kelly Clarkson in September.**



vaccinated live studio audience is NBCUniversal’s Kelly Clarkson, returning for season three. Clarkson will still air mostly in 2 p.m. time periods across its launch group, the NBC Owned TV Stations, in major markets. But in 2022, Kelly Clarkson will take over the 3 p.m. time slots of Warner Bros.’s concluding *Ellen DeGeneres*.

“Daytime’s hard but COVID’s harder,” Alex Duda, executive producer of the Daytime Emmy-winning talker, said. “If we learned anything during COVID, it’s to present the reality to your audience and be real about where you are. This too shall pass. That’s what we’re going to do this fall — we’re trying to find the bright spots in the darkness.”

### Keeping ‘House Seats’ Filled

Kelly Clarkson hasn’t entertained live audiences since the March 2020 shut down, but it has brought in virtual audiences, via individual monitors. While Duda and company are thrilled to have live audiences back, Clarkson also likes being able to see the on-screen faces of virtual audience members, so the show will reserve six of those “house seats” for people to attend the show from all over the world, Duda said.

Ahead of season three, Clarkson’s production team is considering which song the pop star will open with. Clarkson’s opening “Kellyoke” segment, in which an audience member selects a song for the pop star to sing, has been one of the show’s signature features, both on air and online. As the show brings back live audiences after a turbulent year and a half, Clarkson’s team feels this year’s selection needs to be extra impactful.

“We’ve been talking about what our opening song is going to be but a couple of months ago, we had a different song in our heads,” Duda said.

With things constantly changing during the pandemic, “we’ve gotten really good at having a quicksand picnic,” Duda said. “We eat our sandwiches fast, but no matter what, there’s still hope. That’s the important message of our show — people want to feel hope and to see the light.” ●



# NextGen TV Has a Busy Summer

ATSC 3.0 sees dozens of rollouts, innovative projects and promising predictions, but concerns about viewer acceptance remain



By Gary Arlen  
@garyarlen

The numbers for NextGen TV look good right now:

- Stations in 16 more markets are lighting up their ATSC 3.0 signals this summer, bringing the total to 47 metro areas.

- About 150 stations are involved, with many transmitting multiple channels.
- Sales forecasts envision 2 million receivers this year, 4 million next year and 11 million in 2023, plus a new line of 3.0 set-top boxes.

With those data points in hand — and a September multi-station launch in Washington, D.C., to provide a tech showcase for politicians — NextGen TV cheerleaders are bubbling with enthusiasm.

“NextGen TV signals now reach 22% of households in our stations’ footprints,” said Mark Aitken, VP of advanced technology at Sinclair Broadcasting Group and president of its One Media subsidiary. Sinclair is also working on a hybrid TV approach that includes STIRR, its ad-supported video-on-demand streaming service, Aitken said.

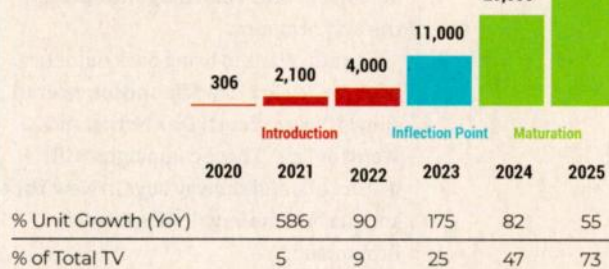
## Scale Will Be ‘A Lot Faster’

The Pearl TV broadcast group consortium backing the new format is “100% focused on scale,” the always-ebullient managing director Anne Schelle said. “This is not your grandmother’s [digital] transition. The economics are much different. ... Scale will happen a lot faster.”

Patrick Butler, president of America’s Public Television Stations, noted that about

## TV SHIPMENTS WITH NEXTGEN TV

U.S. Market – Units (000s)



SOURCE: CTA, U.S. Consumer Technology Five-Year Industry Forecast, 2020-2025, July 2021

a dozen public TV stations have transitioned to 3.0 and that New Mexico PBS now carries all five streams in the new format: PBS, PBS Kids, FNX, World and Create.

Butler, though, said many public TV stations are “stymied” by the costs and have asked Congress for funding.

Analysts are keeping their expectations in check. Stephen Baker, VP of industry analysis at the NPD Group, said “we’re barely in the infancy” of NextGen TV.

“Until the costs [drop] and availability becomes more widespread, then whatever the tech and software bring doesn’t mean a lot,” said Baker, who follows consumer electronics for the market research firm.

Importantly, questions remain about the non-broadcast services NextGen TV promoters have promised: capabilities to provide new business options.

John Hane is president of BitPath, a joint venture of Sinclair and Nexstar Media Group, two of Pearl TV’s members. BitPath’s main mission is “to create data broadcasting services that are profitable



**Graham Media Group is working with Google on an addressable advertising experiment, said VP and chief innovation officer Catherine Badalamente.**

and serve the public interest,” he said. To do that, it’s necessary to have 3.0 capacity “on the air,” he said. He expects to be on at least 25 towers this year and to serve more than 100 stations by the end of 2022.

BitPath, too, is “just at the beginning of the process,” Hane said.

At E.W. Scripps-owned WXYZ Detroit, a local development team customized Run3TV to match the station’s branding and supplied the framework with on-demand content that viewers can access via NextGen TV remotes.

“The content includes categorized news video packages along with daily weather forecasts from their local weather meteorologists,” Scripps VP and chief technology officer Bryan Dunbar said.

## Adoption Coming Quickly

Catherine Badalamente, VP and chief innovation officer at Graham Media Group, has also focused on supplementary interactive content. She called the Pearl framework a “solid base” for developing live streams, VOD and data-based services.

Badalamente said Graham has been working with Google to experiment with addressable advertising — “initially within the supplementary content, but as we find solutions, we hope to directly monetize the broadcast ad breaks.”

After a year of pandemic-induced virtual development, the NextGen TV community will plunge into a round of personal meetings, addressing issues around operations and digital opportunities.

Up first is the Advanced Television Systems Committee’s 2021 NextGen Broadcast conference in Washington, D.C., Aug. 25 and 26. At the CEDIA Expo in Indianapolis on Sept. 1-3, NextGen TV hopes to make inroads prior to CES in Las Vegas in January.

September also will see the landmark launch of a special NextGen TV showcase in Washington, D.C., with coordination of signals between public TV station WHUT and WIAV, Sinclair’s newly acquired Class A station. Program details and promotional plans (including to policymakers) are still being developed. ●



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# New Tech Brings New Tools to Captioning

Voice recognition, AI part of push to make live subtitles more accurate



By Gary Arlen  
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As the Federal Communications Commission proceeds with exploring new rules for the expanding world of captioning and other assistive video technologies (“Keeping Closed Captioning Ahead of the Curve,” B+C/Multichannel News, July 2021, page 30), more and more organizations are developing new tools and techniques for the expanding audience. They are working with voice recognition, artificial intelligence and new tools for audio descriptions for vision-impaired audiences.

With the increased use of captions in web videos and commercials, 87% of organizations are captioning their content, according to 3PlayMedia, a Boston company that provides closed captioning, transcription and audio description services for digital platforms. 3PlayMedia’s analysis also found a 42% “increase in emotional response” from videos that include captions.

While the debate continues about the value of Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR) versus human-input captions, both approaches are part of the fast-evolving process to caption live programs, which often have notoriously inaccurate captions. Chris Antunes, co-founder and co-CEO of 3PlayMedia, perceives that producer and advertiser interest in captioning has accelerated in the past two years.

“The tone has changed,” he said. “It had been a compliance issue, but in the past few years it has shifted to brand. It’s a core



part of how people think about their products, and it has happened so rapidly.”

## Captions Can Boost Engagement

3PlayMedia has worked with Brightcove, Facebook, Vimeo, YouTube, Zoom and Amazon Web Services. The company said its closed captions for Discovery Digital Networks’ YouTube videos led to a 7.3% increase in overall views with a 13.5% spurt in increased views during the first two weeks.

Although 3PlayMedia has largely eschewed live captioning, Antunes indicated that the company is examining new options. He declined to identify prospects but said, “this autumn is a good time to enter the live market.”

Antunes cited greater use of technologies to create captions. Most of them are not new, but they go far beyond the original stenographic writing that has been used to generate most closed captions. For example, recent advances in “voice writing” (also called “shadow speaking”) are now being used. Rather than trying to capture and convert the

The Media Access Group, part of Boston public broadcaster GBH Media, provides “live to air” captioning for CBS’s *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert* (above). Below, GBH Media Group managing director Alison Godburn.



words of every reporter into text, a captioning presenter repeats the words, thus giving the ASR system a constant voice and accent (without location background noise) for more accurate transcriptions. The technique has been used for years in other settings, such as court reporting, and Antunes said he believes this factor will accelerate live captions’ accuracy and value.

One barrier he sees: finding the staff to handle such live productions, as well as to oversee machine-based automated captions.

Like other caption producers, 3PlayMedia has largely focused on working with producers of prerecorded programming and commercials. Among its clients is Sephora, the cosmetics retailer, for which the company captions online commercials. 3PlayMedia has also focused on enterprise and educational productions, which Antunes sees as a major opportunity: “the much larger, faster-growing content on the web.”

Also based in Boston, the Media Access Group, a successor to the pioneering WGBH Captioning Center, agrees that the appetite for captioning is going in many directions. Its predecessor was established in the 1980s to create captions for many public TV producers. Now MAG’s clientele includes theatrical studios, commercial networks, cable programmers and streaming companies, GBH Media Group managing director Alison Godburn said.

With a staff of about 50 people in Boston and Los Angeles, MAG generates “hundreds of hours per week” of captions and audio descriptions for real-time and offline programs, including about six to seven hours of live content daily for the *PBS NewsHour* and other local and network programs. (GBH is the rebranded name for the entity that holds the licenses for Boston public TV stations WGBH and WGBX, as well as other media properties.)

Among its clients is CBS’s *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert*, which MAG captions “live to air” during the nightly CBS transmission.



"We work across all platforms," Godburn said. "Platforms are changing."

Tim Alves, supervisor of technical services for the GBH MAG, describes a team of "highly trained sound captioners" who handle live audio, transcribing on stenography machines to create captions. They use both proprietary software and steno software from multiple vendors.

The range of productions means that sometimes "we have scripts," while other times the captioners use voice recognition software for initial transcribing, but inevitably that requires "a human element" to tweak the verbiage, Alves adds.

"One hundred percent accuracy is our goal," Godburn said, citing "the big tech team" that is looking at new software to handle captions. GBH has "a linguist on staff to do translations" when necessary.

As for pricing, it's "all over the board, depending on content and the process," Godburn said. "Pricing is very different depending on workflow," such as the use of voice recognition and whether the captioning is for a commercial or longform program.

Godburn has perceived a "greater awareness of inclusion," which will drive the expansion of captions for more audiences. "There are so many advances in speech technology and we're looking into them," he said, such as automated voices for the audio description world, which creates "a visual script" for the sight-impaired.

Alves believes such assistive services "will eventually become ubiquitous."

"With everyone using streaming video, you'll see more captions and more people will rely on them and expect them," he predicted. "Now with everything going online, there's a big boom."

IBM has built its extensive "Live Captioning" package as part of the company's broader Artificial Intelligence for Media framework that incorporates capabilities such as Watson Speech-to-Text, Watson Media and Cloud Video, all of which are integrated with other IBM assets such as Cognitive Services, IBM

**IBM Media and Entertainment Industry group lead partner Jay Hiremath is working on artificial intelligence-powered captioning solutions.**

Weather and Hybrid Cloud Services. Jay Hiremath, the lead partner in IBM's Media and Entertainment Industry group, said the core capabilities for live captioning news programs and events incorporate AI and machine learning applied to speech-to-text, automated metadata annotation and other features.

He characterized captions for broadcasting and streaming of news and sports content as a good match for IBM's AI models which "could be trained and hyper-localized for specific TV affiliate stations."

The hybrid cloud-based architecture enables IBM to extend captions and annotate content on new platforms like NextGen TV (ATSC 3.0), mobile, eSports, gaming and EDGE-based applications, he adds. "Users can upload a glossary of specialized market-specific terminology that arms Watson with greater context and ultimately can help improve caption accuracy." IBM declined to identify its broadcast and streaming clients.

Hiremath said the "ability to store these captions as annotated time-coded metadata enhance the monetization opportunities as well as provide additional content analytics." Hiremath pointed to news archives that need metadata annotation. Captions provide an opportunity "to monetize and develop new products and content experiences," he said.

He foresees future uses of captioning in creating augmented experiences for other disabilities like virtual sign language or augmented content for blind.

C-SPAN's extensive captioning activities represent both historic objectives and cross-platform purposes, along with a sometimes-complicated production process. For more than 20 years, the public-affairs programmer has been integrating real-time caption transcripts with archival value.

C-SPAN's core video feeds — live sessions from the floors of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives — include real-time captions that are produced by each chamber and embedded into their video feeds, which C-SPAN passes

through. The network's three long-term vendors (Media Captioning Services, National Captioning Institute and Vitac) create captions for C-SPAN's mix of live events and recorded productions, such as committee or agency hearings, Book TV discussions and call-in talk shows. Much of the programming goes into C-SPAN's searchable archive, in which the captions become the basis for a search.

C-SPAN VP of digital media Richard Weinstein said the system is "unique" in the way it "leverages captions on the website and as part of our video library," which now includes 268,000 hours of content — all of it searchable via captions. Indexing the captions in a searchable database enables them to become the basis for finding what a politician said. He explained how a researcher could, for example, enter the name of a senator and a term such as "oil pipeline" and find out exactly when that person used those words, thanks to the time stamps on all the captions. That capability dates back to content produced since 1994. Starting in 2010, "we added it on our website as a search tool," Weinstein added. "Captioning is a very important aspect of giving us the ability to build our video library."

C-SPAN's captioning vendors rely almost exclusively on live, human production, although Weinstein said some of them are exploring speech-recognition technology to create captions. He acknowledged the challenge of producing accurate captions, especially during heated debates when argumentative politicians are talking over one another.

### Automated, Broadband Options

The recent strides in voice recognition and artificial intelligence are another major factor in captioning juggernaut.

The National Captioning Institute, a pioneer in broadcast caption services, has introduced its CaptionSentry Automated Captioning Solution (ACS), originally developed for real-time live streaming and broadcasting use but which can also be used for prerecorded programs. NCI said its automated CaptionSentry systems can take





over from humans and vice versa, including a “fail-safe feature” that can be activated to allow for CaptionSentry to send captions if the human captioner loses their connection and stops sending data.

NCI also has created an auto-translation system to convert English and Spanish captions into more than 40 languages.

Cognitive Accuracy, a measurement standard devised by NCI, is another feature that may figure into the FCC examination. It is based on the ability of the viewer to comprehend the intended meaning of the captions using audio comparisons. It has not been vetted by the FCC, and NCI said it will not try to establish it as an industry standard.

The emerging NextGen TV standard (ATSC 3.0) incorporates SMPTE-Timed Text (SMPTE-TT) as its captioning standard. SMPTE-TT is an XML-based caption codec that has flexible features such as handling languages that read right to left and enables caption data to be displayed with the “original look and feel” for more advanced display capabilities. It allows captions to include some attributes traditionally associated with subtitles, including foreign-alphabet characters and some mathematical symbols. The FCC has declared SMPTE-TT a “safe harbor interchange and delivery format” that complies with Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act (CVAA) regulations.

The FCC’s broadband captioning rules — another target of the current examination (see sidebar) — don’t require closed captions on movies or consumer-generated videos unless they have been previously “shown on TV with captions.”

Endorsing caption services does not necessarily mean that a broadcaster will actually deliver the service, as ITV in England found out during “Deaf Awareness Week” this spring on its *This Morning* program. Although the show’s opening had a visually signed “Hello, good morning,” the program proceeded to run a special segment about hearing impairment but failed to include any closed captions or interpreter — a lapse that was noticed, and loudly criticized, by its target audience. ●

## ADVOCATES, INDUSTRY SPAR AT FCC OVER STRICT CAPTION MANDATES

OF ABOUT TWO dozen comments and replies to the FCC’s public notice seeking to update the Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act (CVAA), the initial input includes a predictable split between organizations speaking for the hearing-impaired and other disabled communities, who want more federal oversight, and industry groups that contend that current rules are working well.

Throughout the treatises from both camps, there are frequent compliments for the FCC’s support of captioning rules, with both sides agreeing on the value of the assistive services. But there were also areas of disagreement:

- The group identifying itself as “Accessibility Advocacy and Research Organizations” (nearly two dozen organizations representing the deaf and hearing-impaired, plus academic and research institutions) contended that the FCC should update video programming accessibility rules and accelerate efforts to encourage audio-description features.

- Communications and technology lobbyists, including the National Association of Broadcasters, NCTA-The Internet and Television Association, ACA Connects and the Consumer Technology Association, said existing FCC regulations and industry actions sufficiently support the goals of CVAA, and it is premature to establish audio-description rules.

Although the FCC has not set a timetable for its CVAA procedure, the examination is likely to become a rallying point for disabled communities. The advocacy/research coalition, in filings, emphasized the “growth in popularity” of assistive service but insisted that the success of FCC rules “cannot be measured by individual examples of accessibility.”

“Technology accessibility is a civil right,” the advocates said, urging the FCC to “press ahead and ensure that the many remaining gaps” are addressed “now ... and into the future as communications and video technologies evolve.” The group’s comments focus on the “critical” need for the FCC to “ensure the accessibility of multimodal communications platforms,” including wireless and online video distributor (OVD) ecosystems. It also insists that “the record supports commission action to expand the availability of audio description on OVD platforms.”

“Live captioning metrics” and “caption quality

standards” should also be part of the FCC requirements, according to the advocacy organizations.

### TV Groups Seek Fewer Rules

The National Association of Broadcasters argues that TV stations “have successfully implemented the FCC’s rules governing closed captioning of IP-delivered video programming.” The broadcasters’ group dismissed the advocacy organizations’ call for an “overhaul” of the FCC’s captioning regulatory regime, focusing on the “crucial distinction between ... ‘first-party’ platforms (e.g. a TV station’s website) and third-party platforms that are not owned, operated or authorized by a broadcaster.”

“These requests ignore certain realities,” NAB said. “Requiring broadcasters to ensure that their programming includes captions when later shown on unrelated, third-party outlets would place broadcasters in an impossible situation.” The advocacy organizations themselves concede that the video distribution system to such outlets is “complex and lengthy,” NAB pointed out.


NAB cites similar problems with audio-description requirements and suggests that, “Collaboration is more effective than enforcement for ensuring and improving accessibility to video programming.”

NCTA said the “cable industry has made substantial investments in accessibility,” citing among examples a Comcast partnership with a wearable technology startup to provide new ways for visually impaired customers to connect with content through virtual reality. NCTA also cited a Charter Spectrum Access App that enables real-time playback of audio description and closed captioning via a customer’s tablet or phone to offer a “more personalized and immersive television experience.”

ACA Connects challenged proposals to require multiple Secondary Audio Program (SAP) auxiliary audio channel availability, possibly by requiring cable operators to allot an expanded number of SAP channels. ACA Connects said that “navigation devices continue to evolve to deliver ... multiple audio streams,” obviating the need for such service on legacy equipment. The group also contended it was “premature for the FCC to adopt audio description quality standards as rules.” — GA







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# Channel-Flipping Makes a Comeback

With use of ad-supported streamers rising, guides and surfing are back in vogue



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**T**V watching is going back to the future.

Streaming seemed to change everything about television.

Netflix popularized binge watching, and other subscription video-on-demand services reinforced the notion that viewers could watch whatever they wanted whenever they wanted.

Partly because of sticker shock, more viewers are watching ad-supported linear streaming services. To find things to watch, they're going old school, flipping channels like their grandparents did with the living room Philco and using 1980s-style scrolling program guides.

"I come home in the evenings, I'm tired from work," Xumo CEO Colin Petrie-Norris said in describing his own viewing habits. "I want to eat my meal. I don't want to hold a remote control and search around for an hour on Netflix trying to pick out a movie."

In 2020, after Comcast bought Xumo and integrated its channels into Flex's live guide, which blends linear streaming channels from several providers, the move led to a 62% lift in time watched, Xumo said.

"It's the old lean-back, lean-forward stuff," Petrie-Norris said. "When we talk about use cases, everybody's like, 'Yeah, that's a lot of how I watch television,' but they forget that kind of TV is available."

He's not the only one whose streaming habits are changing.

According to a recent survey by Horowitz Research, 46% of TV content viewers in the

U.S. report using an ad-supported streaming service at least monthly. The survey found 28% use a free ad-supported TV (FAST) service with ad-supported linear channels, in addition to watching subscription on-demand services.

## AVOD on the Rise

TVision says the share of app viewers using AVOD has grown to 37.4% in the second quarter from 34.5% in the first quarter and 32% a year ago.

"It's definitely what's old is new," said Steve Meyer, VP of Xfinity Flex at Comcast, who manages the streaming product.

A few years ago, Flex viewing was almost 100% on-demand. Now, one-quarter to one-third of the audience is flipping through channels, Meyer said. The live guide is the third-most-navigated part of Flex's user interface, behind the home page and search.

"With the proliferation of what is going into these main streaming services, it's only a matter of time until these become more established habits," he said.

Smart-TV maker Vizio said the

**Ad-backed streaming service Pluto TV offers a programming guide familiar that pay TV subscribers would find familiar.**

WatchFree collection of linear channels is the second-most watched AVOD app on its SmartCast platform.

"We're seeing lots of engagement via home screen banners, through our search functions and by utilizing the WatchFree button on the remote," Vizio VP of engagement Steve DeMain said. "But there are a lot of people who are new to streaming that prefer leaning back and surfing, like they have for decades now, through a programming guide."

"The EPG is a powerful tool for consumers and an area of innovation for us. Leveraging viewing data, we can use the EPG to drive much better experiences. Look for more on that from us in the coming weeks and months ahead."

Programmers like Jukin Media, which had its origins on YouTube, are creating linear channels for streaming TV platforms. Familiarity with the brand and the content help bring viewers to the channels, Jukin Media CEO Jon Skogmo said.

"We have built a loyal base of 250 million fans socially, and when they flip through the channels, they can stop and see People Are Awesome or Fail Army," Skogmo said.

"Flipping's back," exclaimed Skogmo's brother Michael, Jukin's head of marketing and communications.

Pluto TV has been fighting the gravitational pull of SVOD since it launched as a content website in 2014. "Linear channels might be new to other services, but it's always been the way Pluto TV acted," said Scott Reich, senior

VP, programming at Pluto TV, now owned by ViacomCBS.

"To a certain segment of the audience, yes, there's familiarity and there's that nostalgia element to being able to deal with something that looks like cable," Reich said. "However, there's also a whole new segment of the audience that never had cable before, so this is new to them and they're thrilled that it's organized this way versus living in the other way where you've got to choose for yourself."





Reich says about 85% of the viewing on Pluto is on the linear side of the platform. But Reich, like others in the streaming business, carefully guards many of the statistics about viewing behavior that they use to build engagement and maximize time spent viewing.

On Pluto, viewers can find things to watch faster through the way the guide and channels are organized by genres and categories. Pluto offers numerous options when viewers want to switch from, say, checking the weather to watching some reality TV or settling into a crime drama. It's easy to find those things and increase session duration. On average, the typical Pluto viewer will change the channel up to eight times a session after they finish watching a show, looking for the next thing to watch.

"We do see people bounce around the platform, but it's a positive," Reich said.

"If you like reality, we've got a whole category for that," the Pluto executive said. "If you just want to watch movies, we make it easier to get into the genres and formats that might be of interest to someone."

Those channels are put together by a team of about 30 programmers and channel editors Pluto TV calls experts in their categories.

"I would say our advantage is that, where Netflix is all driven by behavior and [artificial intelligence], we are human-curated," Reich said. "We have comedians look to see that the comedy channel is right. We've got a former journalist in there as well. My favorite example is always the guy on my team who is a former MMA champion. He looks after the fight channel. These guys are the audience, so they've got a leg up knowing what might work."

Pluto TV has been tweaking its guide to make it easier for users to find things they want to watch without going to another service. The channels are grouped by genre.

"It's a living, breathing guide," Reich said. "If a channel is not performing, we'll try a different strategy. If it's still



**At top, Jon Skogmo, co-founder and CEO of Jukin Media. Center, Xumo CEO Colin Petrie-Norris. At bottom, Comcast's Xfinity Flex set-top.**

not working we might rebrand it completely or drop it. It's something we're constantly tinkering with. We look at the data to listen to the audience to see if we've got the mix correct," Reich said.

Pluto TV judges its channels on a minutes-per-user metric, which tells not only how much time users are spending on a per-session basis, but also how often they come back. "That's the really important piece," Reich said. "As long as their session durations are growing, their frequency is going up, we know we've got the right mix."

Dropping channels can be tricky because some heavy Pluto TV users are vocal on social media. Reich notes that viewers get a warning when, for example, the James Bond Channel has to be taken off the platform because the rights temporarily moved to another distributor.

At Xumo, the channel guide is constantly changing the presentation to users, according to Petrie-Norris.

Typically, the top 10 channels in the guide are based on what's popular with people similar to the viewer and what's trending where the viewer lives.

While Xumo strives to give viewers what they want, it also gives viewers choices they don't know they want. So, instead of the most popular channels — eight news channels and two showing movies — the guide serves up popular channels from more than those two genres, such as three news, two movies, two lifestyle-oriented, two general entertainment and one from sports. That increases engagement by 30% to 40%, Petrie-Norris said.



And instead of giving viewers the three most popular channels in a genre, Xumo offers up two very popular ones plus one the viewer might not have heard of. That technique also can deliver a rise in performance, the CEO said.

Once a viewer has watched for a while, Xumo reconfigures the guide based on what the user has watched in the past. That means different viewers see different channels when they use the remote control to summon the guide on Xumo.

"Not only is the guide easy to use, but you can make it even more resonant and personalized because of what digital allows you to do," Petrie-Norris said.

### Linear Content Gains on Flex

Comcast has also been making moves to surface linear content on the Flex platform for broadband-only customers who, in addition to on-demand content, were looking at live video channels.

"That was one of the things we noticed early on and we started to lean into," Comcast Cable's Meyer said. "So we've consciously, with Flex, built our user experience so there are opportunities to surface live in linear content to meet customers where they are with this kind of behavior, which is a very traditional, classic behavior but is absolutely manifesting itself in the streaming space."

Meyer said that it is becoming increasingly important to help broadband customers find live events as more of them get streamed. Those events range from the Super Bowl and Olympics to the Tour de France and the U.S. Open.

"We put banners on our homepage and we've created a live streaming calendar" that highlights both games and new series, like Disney Plus's *Loki*, he said. "We've really put a lot of energy into our guide to not just say, 'hey, this is available now,' but to set expectations so customers can plan and prepare to tune in at a certain time to catch these events, which is again very traditional television viewing behavior." ●



# Broadband Slowdown Will Have to Wait Another Day

## Comcast, Charter report strong Q2 high-speed internet growth as analysts brace for declines



By Mike Farrell  
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Comcast and Charter Communications once again defied the general logic, reporting stronger-than-expected Q2 broadband growth despite signs the segment was headed for an extended period of sluggishness.

That slowdown will have to wait for another day, though, as Comcast reported its strongest second quarter ever in terms of broadband growth, adding 354,000 high-speed internet customers in the period and soundly beating analysts' consensus estimates of 270,000 additions.

Charter, which reported its Q2 results on July 30, one day after Comcast, said it added about 400,000 total broadband customers (365,000 residential and 35,000 business) in the period, outpacing consensus estimates of 275,000 total additions by 46%.

Most analysts had expected the pace of broadband additions to slow down after the industry reported its best growth ever in 2020, fueled by the pandemic and stay-at-home orders for work and school for most Americans. The cable industry added 5.6 million broadband customers in 2020, according to Wells Fargo Securities media analyst Steven Cahall, and most analysts expected that growth to slow to about 2.5 million additions in 2021.

But while the pace of the slowdown was expected to accelerate after the huge gains in 2020 and many Americans beginning to return to offices and schools, that will have to wait at least a little while longer. Most analysts still expect broadband additions

will be lower in 2021 than 2020, but the gap will be narrower. Expectations that 2021 growth will be behind 2019 results are no longer being considered, at least for Comcast, according to MoffettNathanson principal and senior analyst Craig Moffett.

### Keeping Up the Pace

"Growth remains torrid," Moffett said of Comcast. "Broadband is doing better than even we had expected — full-year 2021 is now expected to be much better than full-year 2019, something that seemed aspirational, at best, at the start of the year — and wireless is gaining some serious momentum. With rising margins and still-low capital intensity, the cash generation of the business is nothing short of incredible."

Comcast's broadband growth helped drive even better increases in revenue and cash flow for its cable unit. Revenue at Comcast Cable rose 11% to \$16 billion (ahead of analysts' consensus estimates of \$15.7 billion) and cash flow rose 14.5% to \$7.1 billion, beating consensus predictions of \$6.8 billion. Even video customer losses, at 399,000 in the quarter, beat expectations of a 430,000 customer loss. Comcast also added about 280,000 wireless customers, ending the period with about 3.4 million Xfinity Mobile subscribers.

Moffett wondered aloud how the results, and the huge amount of cash Comcast is expected to generate, will be used. In the past, the analyst said Comcast could spend as much as \$20 billion on buybacks by 2023. Comcast has \$9.5 billion remaining on its repurchase authorization, but didn't say how much of that it intends to spend this year. Moffett opined that they

**Comcast CEO Brian Roberts tried to throw cold water on deal speculation, saying, "We have all the parts."**

could use the money to acquire scale.

"What they do about that issue is anyone's guess," Moffett wrote. While the cable segment is doing well and buybacks would probably be the best use of cash, he added, "the debate is about Peacock and whether Comcast needs to (or will) buy ViacomCBS (God forbid) or a not-yet formed Discovery-WarnerMedia."

Comcast chairman and CEO Brian Roberts tried to squash the M&A speculation on a conference call with analysts, but left the door open to international partnerships. Reports have said Roberts met informally with ViacomCBS chair Shari Redstone and CEO Bob Bakish to discuss streaming partnerships outside of the U.S.

"We have a majority broadband-centric company and we like the mix," Roberts said, adding that a partnership that could enhance its international streaming position would be "something you might talk to others and consider."

But as far as making another big acquisition to gain scale, he added, "We have all the parts."

Charter's performance in the period comes after Bernstein analyst Peter Supino downgraded the stock to "market perform" in July, partly because of an expected slowdown in broadband growth. While most analysts see broadband customer gains waning in the next few years, the intensity of that deceleration may not be as dramatic as first expected.

Supino ticked up his estimates slightly for Comcast. He now thinks Comcast will add 375,000 broadband customers in Q3 (from previous estimates of 350,000 additions) and hit 1.6 million additions for the full year, up from his previous mark of 1.4 million adds. That's in line with Comcast raising its year-end estimate for mid-teens percentage broadband additions, from the previous prediction of a mid-single digit increase.

Charter did not change its full-year guidance, expecting broadband additions to be at or above the pace they were in 2019.

The additional growth spurred increased optimism from some analysts.





"A solid beat by Charter, and after Comcast's bullish internet outlook yesterday (July 29) we expect optimism around lower churn and stronger net additions in broadband," Cahall wrote in a note to clients.

### Ample Runway for Charter

Charter chairman and CEO Tom Rutledge said on a conference call to discuss Q2 results that he sees ample runway ahead for high-speed data services, adding that as the population rises and housing demand increases, so will adoption of broadband services.

"The big issue in general adoption is more of a digital literacy issue than it is a cost issue," Rutledge said. "And it's continuing to improve in terms of market adoption because of the way people can use the tools on the internet today, at any level and at any age. And so I think you have a continuous march of broadband adoption right up to occupied housing over the next five years."

About 100,000 of Charter's broadband additions came as a result of federal and state Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB) subsidiary programs, and could churn off in the future. Lower-than-expected non-pay churn also added to the growth.

Barclays Research media analyst Kannan Venkateshwar saw some potential hidden meaning in Charter's decision to keep guidance as is, adding it could be normal conservatism, or driven by the company's assessment of the quality of the pool of available subscribers and management's view that churn could return to normal levels. "However, visibility around these trends seems to be limited based on call commentary, which means that the unwind of some of these tailwinds could be a surprise, not just for Charter but for the industry as a whole," he said.

### For Altice, a Less Rosy Picture

Whatever the reason, Charter and Comcast's results were in sharp contrast to Altice USA, which kicked off the earnings season July 28 by showing a decline (12,000 customers) in broadband subscribers.

Altice USA has the highest broad-

## WALKING THE LINE

Broadband subscriber growth rates are holding relatively steady for Comcast and Charter through Q2 2021, something that most analysts weren't expecting.

	Q2 2020	Q3 2020	Q4 2020	Q1 2021	Q2 2021
COMCAST	5.8%	6.7%	6.9%	6.7%	6.7%
CHARTER	8.3%	8.8%	8.3%	7.3%	5.5%

SOURCE: Company reports, MoffettNathanson estimates and analysis

## NOTHING BUT NET

Broadband net additions in the second quarter were behind last year, but not by much for the top two operators, as consumers continued to snap up high-speed data offerings.

	Q2 2020	Q3 2020	Q4 2020	Q1 2021	Q2 2021
COMCAST	323	633	538	461	354
CHARTER	850	537	246	355	400
ALTICE USA	70	56	-4	12	0

SOURCE: Company reports, MoffettNathanson estimates and analysis

## STEADY STATE

Wireless subscriber net additions were relatively steady in Q2, as mobile service began to crack the profitability nut.

	Q2 2020	Q3 2020	Q4 2020	Q1 2021	Q2 2021
COMCAST	126	187	246	278	280
CHARTER	325	363	315	300	265
ALTICE USA	34	18	7	5	5

SOURCE: Company reports, MoffettNathanson estimates and analysis

band penetration in the industry at 48.4% and faces the stiffest competition from telcos (Verizon Fios) in its footprint. Thus it could serve as a canary in the coal mine for the rest of the industry.

Altice USA's recent acquisition of a regional fiber-optic broadband service provider helped offset organic customer

losses in the second quarter, as revenue rose 1.7% to \$2.52 billion and cash flow growth was flat at \$1.1 billion in Q2.

Altice said unique customer relationships were down by 12,000 in the period, but showed a gain of 23,000 unique customers with 35,000 subscribers from its most recent acquisition, Morris Broadband, included. Altice USA purchased Morris in April in a deal that valued the North Carolina company at \$310 million.

Organic broadband subscriber growth was flat in the period, but increased to a gain of 30,000 customers with Morris Broadband data included. That compares to a gain of 70,000 broadband subscribers in the prior year.

The same holds true for video customer losses, down 48,000 organically in Q2, or 36,000 when Morris Broadband's 12,000 video customers are considered. Altice USA lost 35,000 video subscribers in Q2 2020.

Residential revenue growth of 1.5% was spurred by a 7.8% rise in broadband sales and a 36.4% spike in news & advertising revenue, supported by a strong recovery in local, regional and national advertising plus additional political advertising revenue from the New York mayoral and New Jersey gubernatorial races.

Altice USA CEO Dexter Goei said he expects broadband subscriber growth to improve next year — a departure from Q1 guidance that edge-outs would help spur growth in the second half of 2021. On the call, he said that most of the edge-out build activity occurs in the summer months, which would push out the impact of those extensions into 2022. "[W]e've signaled going into this year that [in] 2022 and onward we expect to see much more elevated levels of broadband net adds," he said.

Supino, along with other analysts, reduced his 2021 broadband growth expectations for Altice USA as a result.

"Investors need some volume growth to be comfortable with the narrative," Supino wrote. "Zero broadband net adds does nothing to help their case." ●





At a screening of Apple TV Plus's *Schmigadoon!* at New York's Whitby Hotel (l. to r.): director **Barry Sonnenfeld**; producer **Cecily Strong**; **Keegan-Michael Key**; and executive producer **Cinco Paul**.



Shooting the July 26 episode of HGTV's *Celebrity IOU* (l. to r.): **Jonathan Scott**, singer **Josh Groban** and **Drew Scott**.



**Jason Sudeikis**, star of Apple TV Plus's *Ted Lasso*, throws out the first pitch prior to a Chicago Cubs game at Wrigley Field.



**Desus Nice** (l.) and **The Kid Mero** of Showtime's *Desus & Mero* on the red carpet ahead of ESPN's 2021 ESPY Awards at The Rooftop at Pier 17 at the Seaport in New York.



WWE *SmackDown* women's champion **Bianca Belair** on the 2021 ESPY Awards red carpet in New York.

Marion Curtis/StarPix for Apple TV Plus, HGTV, Steve Green/Chicago Cubs, ABC/Michael LeBrecht





Maurice Benard (l.) and Max Gail of ABC's *General Hospital* on the red carpet at the 48th Annual Daytime Emmy Awards.



Sadie Sink and a friend at the Los Angeles premiere of Netflix's *Fear Street Part 1: 1994*.



Jackée Harry of NBC's *Days of Our Lives* at the 48th Annual Daytime Emmy Awards in Los Angeles.



Melissa Claire Egan (l.) and Michelle Stafford of CBS's *The Young and the Restless* arrive for the 48th Annual Daytime Emmy Awards in Los Angeles.



(From l.): Tampa Bay Buccaneers LeSean McCoy, Chris Godwin, Jason Pierre-Paul and Rob Gronkowski accept "best team" honors at the 2021 ESPY Awards at The Rooftop at Pier 17 at the Seaport in New York.

Francis Specker/CNS (x3); Jesse Grant/Getty Images for Netflix; ABC/Lorenzo Bevilacqua



# People

## Notable executives on the move



### BYU BROADCASTING

**Jeff Simpson** was named managing director of BYU Broadcasting, overseeing day-to-day operations of its BYUtv cable channel. He had been president and publisher of the Salt Lake City-based newspaper *The Deseret News*.



### CBS

**Adrienne Roark** was named president, CBS Stations, tasked with work directly with general managers and their teams at the ViacomCBS-owned stations across the country. She comes from Meredith-owned KPTV-KPDX in Portland, Oregon, where she was GM.



### CINEDIGM

Cinedigm has named **Jennifer Soltesz** as VP of business development and strategy, the primary business lead for new partnership engagements for the Digital Networks group. She had been director of content distribution at Epix.



### COMCAST

Comcast Cable has elevated **Kalyn Hove** to regional senior VP, Twin Cities region, overseeing cable operations in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Kansas and Missouri. She had been VP of enterprise unit Comcast Business in the Twin Cities region.



### C2HR

**Kia Painter** has been named to the board of directors of the Content & Connectivity Human Resources Association (C2HR). A 23-year Cox Communications veteran, she is senior VP of business partnerships for the Atlanta-based cable operator.



### CROWN MEDIA

**Steve Handler** has joined Hallmark Channel parent Crown Media Family Networks in New York as senior VP, pricing and planning. The ad-sales veteran most recently worked at Infinitive, where he had been business development lead.



### FOX ENTERTAINMENT

**Darren Schillace** was promoted to president, marketing at Fox Entertainment, overseeing the Fox broadcast network, Tubi, Bento Box, Fox Alternative Networks and Blockchain Creative Labs. He was executive VP, marketing.



### HOTWIRE

**Jeff Martin** has joined telco and internet service provider Hotwire Communications as VP, sales, working with multiple dwelling units in the Tampa Bay, Florida, region. He comes from Comcast, where he had been an account executive.



### INSP

**Ken Reiner** has joined INSP as VP, content acquisition, leading the team responsible for acquiring licensed programming for the network and associated brands. Most recently a consultant, Reiner has been an executive at Raycom Media, Newport Television and Tribune Media.



### JJP

**Russell Jay-Staglik** has joined Los Angeles-based studio Jeff Jenkins Productions as senior VP of development and current programming. He comes from Bunim/Murray Productions, where he had been VP of current and development.





### NBCUNIVERSAL

NBCUniversal has named **John Lee** to the new position of chief data officer within its Global Advertising & Partnerships division. He had been global chief strategy officer at customer experience management firm Merkle.



### NEXSTAR

**Donna D'Amico** was elevated to VP and general manager of Nexstar Media Group's Colorado Springs operation, overseeing KXRM, KXTU and Fox21News.com. She had been director of sales at KXRM and KXTU since 2016.



### SAMBA TV

**Divya Ghatak** has joined the board of directors of omniscreeen advertising and analytics firm Samba TV. The Silicon Valley talent and human resources veteran currently works as chief people officer at SentinelOne.



### STARZ

**Superna Kalle** was elevated to president, international networks, at Starz. She had been executive VP of international digital networks, having joined in 2018 to lead the international expansion of digital platform StarzPlay.

## BRIEFLY NOTED

*Other industry execs making moves*

**Patrick Butler**, president and CEO of America's Public Television Stations (APTS), and **Hilton Howell**, chairman, president and CEO of Gray Television and Atlantic American Corp., were named board members of the Broadcasters Foundation of America. ... **Broderick Johnson** has joined Comcast as executive VP of public policy and digital equity. He comes from law firm Covington & Burling, where he was senior of counsel. ... Mattoon, Illinois-based fiber provider Consolidated Communications has elevated **Greg Flanagan** to VP of carrier sales and business development and **Travis Graham** to VP of commercial and carrier products. ... **David Rawlinson II** was named president and CEO of Qurate, parent to QVC and HSN, effective Oct. 1. Rawlinson was hired by Nielsen in 2020 to run its Global Connect Business, which was renamed Nielsen IQ.



### TEGNA

Tegna has tapped **Christy Moreno** as president and general manager of its NBC affiliate station KING Seattle. She comes from Tegna-owned ABC affiliate WHAS in Louisville where she had been president and GM since 2018.



### TELSTRA

**Noah Drake** has joined Telstra as VP, customer solutions, based in Denver and leading the company's customer solutions group for the Americas. He had been VP of product management at fiber solutions provider Zayo Group in Boulder, Colorado.



### TV ONE

**Charnelle Anderson** has joined TV One and Cleo TV as senior VP of marketing and creative services. She comes from dfree Global Foundation, where she was head of marketing, branding communications and business partnerships for the non-profit financial education firm.



### TVU NETWORKS

**Peter Wyrwich** has joined Munich, Germany-based IP video solutions provider TVU Networks as sales director for the DACH region, which consists of Austria, Germany and Switzerland. He is a 19-year veteran of direct and indirect sales across Europe.



# Ad Meter

Who's spending what where

## PROMO MOJO

Our exclusive weekly ranking of the programming that networks are promoting most heavily (data through Aug. 1).



### 2020 Tokyo Summer Olympics, NBC

TV Ad Impressions: **364,381,019**  
Total TV ad impressions within all U.S. households, including national linear (live and time-shifted), VOD plus OTT and local

Est. Media Value: **\$2,894,097**  
Estimated media value of in-network promos

A promo for the Tokyo Summer Olympics airing across NBCUniversal's networks is No. 1—the third week in a row the Games top our chart. With all eyes on NBC, the network hyped two of its fall dramas: *La Brea* in second and *Ordinary Joe* in fourth. CBS, meanwhile, promoted its summer reality fare—*Love Island* at No. 3 and *Big Brother* at No. 5—helping to crowd out the cable networks that typically dominate our top five.


Visit [nexttu.com/news](http://nexttu.com/news) for weekly Promo Mojo charts between print issues.


### TOP 5 PROMOTIONS


- 2020 Tokyo Summer Olympics, NBC**  
 TV Ad Impressions **364,381,019**  
 Est. Media Value **\$2,894,097**
- La Brea, NBC**  
 TV Ad Impressions **258,680,794**  
 Est. Media Value **\$1,159,518**
- Love Island, CBS**  
 TV Ad Impressions **208,388,412**  
 Est. Media Value **\$1,498,929**
- Ordinary Joe, NBC**  
 TV Ad Impressions **183,681,930**  
 Est. Media Value **\$873,744**
- Big Brother, CBS**  
 TV Ad Impressions **171,878,176**  
 Est. Media Value **\$712,581**


## BIG SPENDERS


Brands ranked by the greatest increase in TV spend (July 26-Aug. 1)

<b>1</b>	
<b>Tremfya</b>	
Spend Increase:	73%
Est. TV Spend:	\$2.3M
Spend Within Industry:	32%
Top Network:	NBC

<b>2</b>	
<b>Dairy Queen</b>	
Spend Increase:	70%
Est. TV Spend:	\$1.8M
Spend Within Industry:	8%
Top Network:	ABC

<b>3</b>	
<b>Old Navy</b>	
Spend Increase:	50%
Est. TV Spend:	\$1.9M
Spend Within Industry:	55%
Top Network:	NBC


<b>4</b>	
<b>Lexus</b>	
Spend Increase:	43%
Est. TV Spend:	\$2.1M
Spend Within Industry:	7%
Top Network:	NBC


<b>5</b>	
<b>BREZTRI Aerosphere</b>	
Spend Increase:	36%
Est. TV Spend:	\$1.8M
Spend Within Industry:	31%
Top Network:	ABC

## MOST-SEEN TV ADS


Brands ranked by TV ad impressions (July 26-Aug. 1)

<b>1</b>	
<b>GEICO</b>	
TV Ad Impressions:	1.47B
Est. TV Spend:	\$10M
Interruption Rate:	2.43%
Top Show:	2020 Tokyo Olympics

<b>2</b>	
<b>Toyota</b>	
TV Ad Impressions:	1.38B
Est. TV Spend:	\$9.5M
Interruption Rate:	2.82%
Top Show:	2020 Tokyo Olympics

<b>3</b>	
<b>Domino's</b>	
TV Ad Impressions:	1.37B
Est. TV Spend:	\$5.7M
Interruption Rate:	1.66%
Top Show:	Friends

<b>4</b>	
<b>Liberty Mutual</b>	
TV Ad Impressions:	1.33B
Est. TV Spend:	\$5.2M
Interruption Rate:	1.98%
Top Show:	Law & Order: SVU

<b>5</b>	
<b>Progressive</b>	
TV Ad Impressions:	948.2M
Est. TV Spend:	\$6.2M
Interruption Rate:	2.24%
Top Show:	2020 Tokyo Olympics



## B+C'S MOST VIEWED

Top stories on [broadcastingcable.com](http://broadcastingcable.com), July 14-Aug. 9

1. DirecTV Spinoff Gets FCC Approval
2. DirecTV Spinoff Expected to Close in Early August
3. 'Jeopardy!' Guest Hosts' Ratings: Robin Roberts Ties for Lowest at 4.7
4. 'Nick Cannon' to Debut Sept. 27
5. 'Heartland' Season 14 on UPtv July 8

To read these stories, go to [broadcastingcable.com](http://broadcastingcable.com).

# DESPITE 'LASSO' BUZZ, APPLE TV PLUS STILL HAS ONLY 3% MARKET SHARE

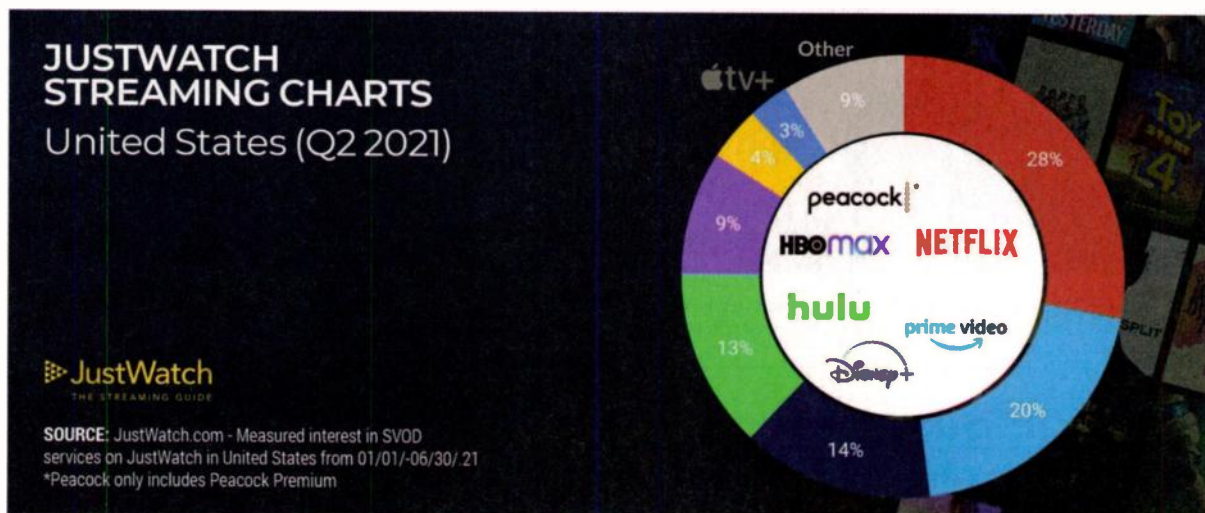
**MORE THAN 20** months after launching its own subscription video-on-demand platform, Apple still hasn't disclosed a subscriber number for Apple TV Plus.

Fueled by an only recently curtailed promotion that gave purchasers of Apple gadgets free access to Apple TV Plus for a year, the service has caught buzz recently. That's thanks to comedy Ted

Lasso, a certified hit that received 20 Emmy nominations. Still, usage is niche.

**NEXT TV** According to streaming search and recommendation service JustWatch, just 3% of its referral traffic overall from Jan. 1-June 30 went to Apple TV Plus. — **Daniel Frankel**

For more stories like this, go to [nexttv.com](http://nexttv.com).



## STICKIEST SHOWS *Top 10 cable programs ranked by viewer engagement\**



Stickiness Rank	Ratings Rank	Telecast (Week Ending July 25)	Network	Stickiness Index*
1	30	90 Day Fiancé: Happily Ever After?	TLC	143
2	94	Tyler Perry's Sistas	BET	138
3	23	WWE Monday Night Raw	USA Network	134
4	174	Love & Hip Hop Atlanta	VH1	134
5	180	Next Door Nightmare	Lifetime	133
6	939	La Rosa de Guadalupe	Galavisión	131
7	148	The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills	Bravo	130
8	27	Good Witch	Hallmark Channel	130
9	518	Keeping Up with the Joneses	LMN	129
10	131	Tyler Perry's The Oval	BET	129



The Stickiness Index looks at viewer engagement based on several factors. A higher number indicates more of the audience is tuned in for the duration of the telecast. \* TV Engagement ratings powered by Comscore's TV Essentials. (Sorted by social media activity.)

Good Witch: Hallmark Channel



# STICKIEST SHOWS Top 10 broadcast programs ranked by viewer engagement\*



Stickiness Rank	Ratings Rank	Telecast (Week Ending July 25)	Network	Stickiness Index*
1	65	Soccer: CONCACAF Gold Cup 2021	Univision	146
2	66	<i>Si Nos Dejan</i>	Univision	144
3	85	<i>La Hija Del Embajador</i>	Univision	140
4	2	NBA Finals	ABC	139
5	70	<i>Diseñando Tu Amor</i>	Univision	139
6	102	<i>Hercai, Amor Y Venganza</i>	Telemundo	138
7	1	2020 Tokyo Summer Olympics	NBC	137
8	60	<i>Premios Juventud 2021</i>	Univision	136
9	4	<i>America's Got Talent</i>	NBC	135
10	107	<i>Exatlón Estados Unidos</i>	Telemundo	127

**comscore** The Stickiness Index looks at viewer engagement based on several factors. A higher number indicates more of the audience is tuned in for the duration of the telecast. \* TV Engagement ratings powered by Comscore's TV Essentials. (Sorted by social media activity.)

## THE BINGE REPORT

THE WEEK OF JULY 19

TV Time users track the shows they're watching on TV via the TV Time app. That data is then used to determine the most-binged shows of the week in the U.S.



## MCN'S MOST VIEWED

Top five stories on *multichannel.com*, July 14-Aug. 9

1. DirecTV Spinoff Gets FCC Approval
2. DirecTV Spinoff Expected to Close in Early August
3. Nexstar Sues Comcast Over WPIX Retransmission Fees
4. 'Heartland' Season 14 on UPtv July 8
5. AT&T to Sell \$6.2 Billion of Debt to Finance DirecTV Spinoff

To read these stories, go to [multichannel.com](http://multichannel.com).

1	<i>Never Have I Ever</i>	Netflix	Share of binges: 4.18%
2	<i>Atypical</i>	Netflix	Share of binges: 1.91%
3	<i>Virgin River</i>	Netflix	Share of binges: 1.75%
4	<i>Manifest</i>	Hulu	Share of binges: 1.74%
5	<i>Grey's Anatomy</i>	Netflix/Hulu	Share of binges: 0.94%
6	<i>One Piece</i>	Netflix/Hulu	Share of binges: 0.93%
7	<i>Loki</i>	Disney Plus	Share of binges: 0.85%
8	<i>Big Brother (U.S.)</i>	CBS	Share of binges: 0.84%
9	<i>Modern Family</i>	Peacock/Hulu	Share of binges: 0.82%
10	<i>Love Island</i>	Hulu	Share of binges: 0.77%

Networks reflected don't include every viewing platform available nor total viewing in share of binge



To receive "The Binge Report" and other TV Time reports, visit [www.whipmedia.com/subscribe/](http://www.whipmedia.com/subscribe/)







# Most-Watched Shows on TV in July



Of all the live, linear minutes watched by VIZIO smart TVs in July, 5.48% of the time was spent watching the Tokyo Olympics. See which other shows captured the most watch-time in the graphic below.



Via Vizio's Inscape, the TV data company with insights from a panel of 17 million active and opted-in smart TVs. Data is linear, live TV only and includes all episode types (new and reruns). Rankings are by percent share duration, defined as "of all the live, linear minutes watched in July, X% of the time was spent on show Y"



## People Active Online\* at Home During the Work Day

1/29/2020-8/2/2021 | Data from 14 Metro Areas, Updated Weekly

People active online\* during the work day before COVID-19  
 People active online\* during the work day now

### NATIONAL AVERAGE IN THE UNITED STATES



22.6 Million

were active online\* during the work day before COVID-19

40.0 Million

are active online\* during the work day now

### CITY BY CITY BREAKDOWN



\*Estimates based on metro area populations and anonymized data taken from a sample of U.S. households powered by the Plume Cloud. Active online defined as 6+ hours between 9a-6p.



## VUIT'S MOST-WATCHED STATION FEEDS *Top 10 local broadcasters streamed on the VUit app*

Rank	Station	Location	Network	Which event drove tune-in?
1	KTSF*	San Francisco-Oakland-San Jose	Lincoln Broadcasting	
2	WFMZ	Philadelphia	Maranatha Broadcasting	
3	WWSB	Tampa-St. Petersburg, Florida	Gray Television	
4	WWTV	Traverse City, Michigan	Heritage Broadcasting	
5	WVUE	New Orleans	Gray Television	
6	WBRC	Birmingham, Alabama	Gray Television	
7	WSNN	Tampa-St. Petersburg, Florida	Citadel Communications	
8	KTUU	Anchorage, Alaska	Gray Television	
9	WKYT	Lexington, Kentucky	Gray Television	
10	KGMB	Honolulu, Hawaii	Gray Television	

\* Most out-of-market viewers

## STREAMED CONTENT *The VUit app's 10 most-viewed pieces of content*



**THE BATTLE OF FORKS ROAD**



- 1 Business First AM** | Daily news series
- 2 ACCDN Confidential Basketball** | Highlight reels
- 3 food.curated.** | Documentary series
- 4 Stirrin' It Up with Chef John Folse** | Culinary program
- 5 Battle of Forks Road** | Local station documentary
- 6 Martin Yan's Gourmet Kitchen** | Culinary program
- 7 The Fly-Over Music Hour** | Curated local music
- 8 VUit eSports** | Original on-demand eSports
- 9 Seeking Justice** | Local station documentary
- 10 Onaway Speedway Racing** | On-demand local sports



### VUIT'S MOST POPULAR CHANNELS

*Most streamed channels on the VUit app for July 2021*

1. ACCDN Confidential
2. SkyVision Live
3. NYC Live Street Cam
4. Exhale TV
5. VUit eSports

*To view these channels, go to [www.VUit.com](http://www.VUit.com)*

**VUit** VUit is a streaming service supported by 200 local TV stations. Run by Syncbak with an investment by Gray Television, VUit offers a variety of feeds from local TV stations and other channels.





By Sally Hudson, VCTI  
VCTI.info

# A Winning Pitch for Providers

## Community collaboration is key to capturing federal broadband grant monies

A new level of resolve to bridge the digital divide has emerged in 2021, resulting in an unprecedented amount of government programs and consequent funding being operationalized at every level of government. Equally dramatic is the shift in decision-making on where and how program money will be spent. In addition to the traditional approach of a national program designed and administered by the Federal Communications Commission, a new approach has evolved, in favor of allocations directly to states, counties, municipalities and tribal areas, empowering them to determine priorities and service providers with whom to partner.

Granted, the Treasury Department still sets guidelines for compliance, but the steering wheel is genuinely in the hands of those closest to the market. For example, 3,233 U.S. counties were allocated a total of \$65.1 billion through the Coronavirus State and Local Recovery Act; amongst the many eligible uses for the funding is “necessary investments in water, sewer and broadband infrastructure.”

An additional \$65 billion is earmarked directly for broadband in the infrastructure bill.

### Accelerate Planning Process

With some funding in hand and anticipating more to come, communities are now pushing hard on service providers to accelerate the path to upgrading broadband to the underserved and the unserved. The pressure on service

providers is to understand where to prioritize, how to build most efficiently, how to craft win-win public-private partnerships, and who else might be breathing down their neck within and tangential to their footprint.

The ramifications are enormous and the timeline is concise. These awards will be depleted within months, not years. Where service providers decide to focus their energy and resources today will impact their market share and profitability for years to come.

Therefore, moving rapidly to build a solid analytical framework and populating it with accurate data is critical to enabling intelligent decisions. The framework should incorporate the following:

1.) Identification of the underserved and unserved within and tangential to their existing footprint, including those whose upload speed is insufficient for today’s economy.

2.) Assessment of viable deployment options within these communities. For example, in a rural area, are there utility poles suitable for aerial fiber deployment? If the distance between homes is dauntingly large, what is the propensity for service with fixed wireless?

3.) Definition of viable project boundaries and rough order of magnitude (ROM) cost to serve.

4.) Identification and analysis of the competitive landscape, especially winners of Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF) awards; assess the value of the award against the ROM.

5.) Weighting these attributes and then

simply running the math to identify the opportunities with the highest possibility of success.

With this data in hand, the service provider will be equipped to prioritize and focus energy on the communities that rose to the top of the list.

### Designing an Efficient Plan

The next step is to drill down further by designing the most efficient network plan possible to expand and/or enhance broadband to the targeted communities. A comprehensive build out plan should identify and consider the following:

- Which locations or census blocks might a community have surveyed and designated as underserved?

- Conduct a review of the new National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) maps with the community to validate the applicability to broadband in extended areas beyond the Form 477 disclosures.

- Are homes with school-going children served? Create a plan to serve them first.

- What is the average cost for a robust fiber-to-the-home network?

- What level of subsidy would be needed to make it a winning proposition for both the local government and service provider?

- Are there any outlying locations that could drive the project cost to be sky high?

- Would fixed wireless to the more remote locations be a viable alternative to achieve the goal for everyone?

- Are there additional households or businesses along the new network path, that expand the addressable market and improve the business case?

- Where should the build start to assure the strongest cash flow?

- Validate if the RDOF winner in the area has plans to build in the near term.

Confirm the RDOF win value against the cost to build the distribution network.

Service providers armed with these detailed plans will be ready to productively engage with community leaders on a path to most efficiently and effectively assuring significantly better broadband for all in the community. ●

**Sally Hudson serves as chief marketing officer at VCTI, a provider of broadband and network technology services.**



# Angela Kang

Showrunner/Executive Producer,  
'The Walking Dead'

Eleventh and final season to start, but spinoffs will keep the franchise rolling

**T**he *Walking Dead* begins its 11th and final season on Aug. 22 on AMC. Angela Kang joined in season two, and was named showrunner before season nine.

Season 11 will air in three eight-episode parts. Kang then shifts to an as-yet-untitled spinoff involving characters Daryl (Norman Reedus) and Carol (Melissa McBride).

The *Walking Dead* fans are eager to see what she comes up with. "For anything that is related to the show, there are a lot of people who care deeply about it being good," Kang said. "That's a great creative environment to be a part of, where everybody really is invested."

Kang spoke with B+C/Multichannel News senior content producer, programming Michael Malone about the final season, and what has changed in television since she came on board *The Walking Dead* a decade before.

## How did you know the time was right to end *The Walking Dead*?

AMC felt it was time. I was really excited to get to tell this final story of the mothership show. There are many spinoffs in the works, so the franchise is really strong and continues to grow.

## How have things changed for women in television across your time on the show?

There's much more awareness about room dynamics and the importance of having different voices in the room. It used to be really

common to be the only woman in the room.

I've got an even split between men and women. That's been the case the entire time I've been running the show. Even before that, there was a good ratio.

It's been very heartening to see more awareness of this issue. But I do think there's still room to improve.

## What are some influences on the final season?

Since we had great source material, that's a major influence. Beyond that, weirdly, the No. 1 thing is probably history. We spend a lot of time talking about moments from world history. When people watch the season, they'll understand why that is. We've been talking about the rise and fall of civilizations, movements for social justice. There were a lot of things in the pandemic that hit close to home — stories we were well down the road on that took on additional resonance for us.



*The Walking Dead*

## BONUS FIVE

**Shows on your DVR?** *A Black Lady Sketch Show*

**Favorite app?** PictureThis

**Favorite podcast?** *Slow Burn*

**Books on your nightstand?** *Exhalation* by Ted Chiang, *Grit* by Angela Duckworth.

**Recent memorable meal?** I met executive producer Greg Nicotero at Pascal's Bistro in Peachtree City (Ga.). I had lobster deviled eggs, fried chicken and mashed potatoes.

At various times we talked about *Alien* and *Aliens* in terms of feel for certain episodes.

**What's your favorite *Walking Dead* moment?** I co-wrote the season four finale with Scott Gimple. There are so many scenes in that episode that were such a pleasure to watch unfold. I really loved watching Norman Reedus and Andy Lincoln do this scene after Rick [Grimes] rips out the throat of a guy to save his son. The two of them have this quiet moment afterward where they're talking about their own sense of guilt and giving each other validation as brothers by choice. It's a really beautiful scene in terms of how those two played it and brought so much more depth than we could've hoped for.

**What about the franchise keeps you invested?** I love the zombies and the horror and the action — it's just really fun. But what draws me in, what draws our audience in, at its core it's a story about people who have banded together to survive. It's about chosen families. There are so many themes we get to touch on that are endlessly interesting. ●





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The traditional network rollout schedule gives new shows like NBC's 'La Brea' a chance to gain notice in an on-demand world

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# Broadcasting Multichannel + Cable News

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10 COVER STORY

## FEATURES

### 10 COVER STORY

The fall TV season may not be the high-wattage event it used to be, but it can still help start a new show off strong.

By Michael Malone

### 4 LEAD-IN

The industry is mapping out what's next for audience measurement now that Nielsen's ratings have lost their accreditation.

By Jon Lafayette

### 18 SPECIAL REPORT: EMMY AWARDS

This year's Emmy contenders taught us about our world while providing an escape from it.

By Paige Albinaki

## ON THE COVER

La Brea, a drama series debuting this fall on NBC.



4 LEAD-IN

Discovery

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18 SPECIAL REPORT: EMMYS

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FUTURE

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# Ad Industry Seeks Alternatives After Nielsen Loses Seal of Approval

**A multiverse of measurement options might emerge**



By Jon Lafayette  
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**T**he TV industry is trying to figure out how it will do business in a world where Nielsen is no longer the dominant measurement company.

On Sept. 1, the Media Rating Council stripped its seal of approval from Nielsen's national TV measurement product, long the industry's gold standard. The MRC's historic move capped a year in which revelations about Nielsen brought decades of complaints about the ratings leader to a head and created fresh opportunities for a legion of rivals.

"The only thing we know for sure is how dissatisfied a lot of the networks are and how serious they are about advancing measurement," said Sean Muller, CEO of iSpot.TV, one of the companies hoping to move into any void created by Nielsen's issues.

The revelation that Nielsen undercounted viewers during the pandemic, potentially costing TV networks hundreds of millions of dollars — a charge made public by the industry trade group VAB and confirmed by the MRC — brought a new focus to the constant criticism Nielsen has historically received as the industry's umpire.

## A More Complex Picture

"The reality is that data has never been more important to content companies, and the challenge of determining exactly

who is watching what, when, across multiple platforms has never been more complex," AMC Networks president of commercial revenue and partnerships Kim Kelleher said. "Any company working in this space needs to evolve and deliver accurate and comprehensive information to its customers and the entire competitive ecosystem that exists around content. That's the price of admission today and going forward, bottom line."

In a letter to clients sent after Nielsen's accreditation was suspended, Nielsen CEO David Kenny said, "Rest assured, we will continue to provide the most representative, reliable and robust audience measurement available, which the market can continue to trade on with confidence."

Kenny said Nielsen was working on fixing its panels, which became smaller and less reliable during the pandemic; strengthening its business continuity and recovery process; improving how it communicates changes in its methods; and changing the way it incorporates broadband-only homes in ratings.

To measure the industry in the future, Kenny said the company is working on Nielsen One, which aims to use the most advanced data science to reflect the new ways people are consuming media, ensure inclusion and representation, enable comparability across all platforms



**iSpot CEO Sean Muller (top) is looking to fill a void for programmers dissatisfied by Nielsen, like AMC Networks president of commercial revenue and partnerships Kim Kelleher (c.) and Discovery CEO David Zaslav (below).**

and de-duplicate audiences.

Comcast's NBCUniversal has been the most public about trying to create alternatives to Nielsen, sending out requests for proposal to more than 50 measurement and data companies in a quest for an independent system with multiple vendors providing multiple metrics to replace the current "outdated" approach to counting viewers at a time when streaming is on the rise and pay TV subscription continue to erode.

NBCU said that 80% of the companies it called on are participating, including Nielsen. Additional companies have asked to join the process. NBCU said it expects to wrap up its process by the week of Sept. 20.

Discovery president and CEO David Zaslav also has been a public critic of Nielsen, whose failure has cost media sellers money. Behind the scenes, Discovery is also seeking some form of redress from the measurement company, according to sources. Discovery is also preparing to use alternate sources for measurement as currency in negotiations with advertisers as soon as the fourth quarter, the sources said.

Discovery officials declined to comment.

As angry as the industry has been with Nielsen in the past, efforts to supplant it have fizzled. This time around, the outcome might be different.

"I think if there's a memory of 2021, I think it will be as the year when real change finally got set in motion on measurement and currency after decades of frustration," VAB president and CEO Sean Cunningham said.

The suspension of Nielsen's accreditation removes the blanket endorsement from the MRC and means instead of treating Nielsen metrics as an agreed-upon





# THE WALKING DEAD®

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truth set, buyers and sellers will know the data is still extremely faulty. "It's now a starting point. There's a need to bring in other measurement data bases, benchmarks and currencies, which started in the upfront," Cunningham said.

How would such a multiverse of measurement work?

If the buyer favors one set of metrics, and the seller likes another, "that becomes part of the art of the deal," Cunningham said. "The marketer wins ultimately, because you've got increased competition for market share. That's all the fuel for innovation and accelerating product development you could possibly ask for."

In the past, attempts to replace or supplement Nielsen have collapsed in part because clients weren't thrilled about paying multiple ratings suppliers.

Cunningham acknowledged buyers and sellers would incur extra costs with a multiverse of measurement options. "But I think those expenses are well incurred if we can assure marketers we're getting closer to the truth and there's some real accuracy in the things they're looking to get business outcomes from."

### Rivals Ramp Up Efforts

While there are thousands of data and research companies, the ones most often mentioned as being able to supply the measurements the industry has been looking to Nielsen for are Comscore, iSpot, TV and VideoAmp.

Even as Nielsen was losing accreditation, rivals were stepping up to get the MRC's checkmark. Comscore said it was working with the MRC to accelerate the start of the process that could lead to accreditation. iSpot's Muller said his company is in the pre-assessment phase of the MRC's accreditations process.

"We're an independent measurement company and I think some industry body should be there to ensure that measurement companies are doing what they say they're doing," Muller said. The MRC process is laborious, lengthy and costly. "Maybe some innovations are needed there as well," he said.

VideoAmp said it is still evolving the

methodology used to integrate data. "It's in the industry's interest. We'll be there when we're ready," VideoAmp chief product officer Cameron Meierhoefer said.

Muller said success in the measurement business now is all about trust. "Trust in the current currency is on a very rapid decline at the moment," he said. "You build trust by having really good products that are consistent, that are accurate, standing behind them and getting people to adopt them. It doesn't happen overnight."

iSpot.TV built a business by cataloging commercials and using smart TV data to measure how many people watched each one. It now also measures and benchmarks how well ads perform in terms of business impact. NBCU uses iSpot's data to show that Olympic ads were having an impact. Discovery in May said it would use iSpot to give advertisers information about the impact of the commercial run across its linear and streaming properties in the United States.

Muller said the industry needs separate systems, one to measure advertising and evaluate its impact and value, another to assess the popularity of content to help decide which shows to produce and how to distribute and schedule them. That's especially important in an environment where dynamic ad insertion means that different viewers might see different commercials even while watching the same show at the same time.

Ultimately, there will be several companies offering those measurements, but not too many. "Once [buyers and sellers] decide what they want to



**At top, Nielsen CEO David Kenny said the company is working to fix its panels. VAB president and CEO Sean Cunningham (c.) predicts a multiverse of measurement options. NBCUniversal used data from iSpot to gauge the impact of ads shown during the Tokyo Olympics (below).**



negotiate on, the best and most trusted in each of these scenarios will rise up," Muller said. "Our core business is helping marketers assess the effectiveness of their creative and media. From an ad-first capability, both in terms of audience delivery and performance, we feel really strongly that the marketplace has already embraced us."

### Time for Experimentation

VideoAmp also sees itself as being one of the two or three companies whose measurement will be used in the future as currency used in contracts between media buyers and sellers, according to Meierhoefer.

VideoAmp integrates a variety of data sets to measure viewing and advertising outcomes for clients. "We see ourselves pushing into the more fundamental aspects of measurement in terms of how you value and trade specific inventory," Meierhoefer said.

Meierhoefer said that VideoAmp's approach to measurement yields more granular data at a lower cost than legacy measurement companies. He said the expense of maintaining a large-scale sample household panel isn't necessary in a world where data is plentiful.

"It's a software problem and the type of problem that we can solve," he said. "I don't have to be a \$2 billion company in order to construct a system that has new capabilities to help our clients make money."

Between now and the next ad-sales upfront, Meierhoefer said there will be a period of experimentation with clients running things in parallel to see what would happen if they used different metrics. "I don't think you're going to see a sort of control-alt-delete reboot scenario where suddenly the whole industry just moves," he said.

"The environment is really fascinating right now," Meierhoefer said. "The industry has grumbled about Nielsen forever. Clients are asking are there alternatives. This is fantastic for us. We feel we're ready to meet the challenge." ●



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## BROADCASTERS





# It's a New Day for CBS Morning Show

## 'Once in a generation' host Nate Burleson joins 'CBS Mornings'



By Michael Malone  
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CBS News has revamped its morning program, with CBS Mornings taking the place of CBS This Morning on Sept. 7. The program comes from a new studio in Times Square, and has added Nate Burleson to the team, alongside Gayle King and Tony Dokoupil.

CBS aims to have the daily show more in line with CBS Sunday Morning. Neeraj Khemlani, president and co-head of CBS News and Stations, described the move to B+C/Multichannel News as a chance to "connect the dots." He called CBS Sunday Morning, hosted by Jane Pauley, as a "cathedral" and plans to offer deep, distinctive stories seven mornings a week.

"It's about organizing ourselves in a way that unleashes that kind of storytelling," Khemlani said. "CBS Mornings is an effort to build a franchise seven days a week. We



put it under one umbrella and have it feel like, and be, all part of one family."

CBS This Morning debuted in 2012, replacing *The Early Show* and offering a harder mix of news than higher-rated *Good Morning America* or *Today*.

New to the weekday program is Burleson. A former NFL player, he signed a long-term deal with CBS that has him not only co-hosting CBS Mornings, but also appearing on CBS Sports and Nickelodeon. Khemlani called Burleson "one of those once-in-a-generation type of voices," who

(From l.): Hosts Tony Dokoupil, Gayle King and Nate Burleson in the new CBS Mornings studio.

brings "an enormous amount of energy and chemistry to the team." He also called him a "Renaissance man," whose background includes not only football, but fashion, finance and poetry.

"I plan on adding some spice, if you will, to the successful recipe that is CBS Mornings," Burleson said in an interview. "I'm an individual with a unique skill set, much more than an athlete."

Burleson described himself as a "team-first guy" with a deep respect for his co-hosts, and those who sat there before him.

Khemlani called the Times Square studio a "catalyst" for the rebrand. It is bigger than the previous studio, with a wider array of settings, and of course Times Square buzzing outside. "It allows us, and enables us, to operate in a 21st century studio for a 21st century battle plan," he said.

Khemlani started his role in April.

"The opportunity to make an impact on the world journalistically at this scale," he added, "comes around once in a lifetime." ●

## 'ALTER EGO' REDEFINES SINGING SHOWS, SAYS JUDGE NICK LACHEY

COMPETITION SERIES *Alter Ego* starts on Fox on Wednesday, Sept. 22, enjoying a healthy lead-in from the sixth season premiere of *The Masked Singer*. The shows are somewhat similar in that both feature contestants singing at something of a remove from the audience, judges and viewer — *Masked Singer* contestants in masks and costumes, and *Alter Ego* hopefuls creating an avatar to perform, the singers' moves depicted by motion capture technology.

Nick Lachey won season five of *The Masked Singer*. He's a judge on *Alter*

*Ego*, along with Alanis Morissette, will.i.am and Grimes.

"I was already part of the Fox family," he told *B+C/Multichannel News*. "When they were looking for panelists for *Alter Ego*, someone was nice enough to think of me."

The quirky concept behind *Alter Ego* grabbed him immediately. "It's unlike anything we've ever seen before," he said. "There's a taste of it on *The Masked Singer*, where you perform behind the

facade of a character. But the way *Alter Ego* combines the artistry of the music and the mind-blowing technology of avatars, I've never seen."

Lachey is lead singer of 98 Degrees and has four solo albums. He

co-hosts *Love Is Blind* on Netflix with wife Vanessa and previously hosted *The Sing-Off* on NBC.

He described winning *The Masked Singer* as "incredibly satisfying."

Lachey mentioned the extreme amount of work that went into his performances. "I tell my kids, it's not about winning or losing, it's, did you do your best? I tried to tell that to

myself, as a man in a Piglet costume."

Watching the judges on *The Masked Singer* — Robin Thicke, Ken Jeong, Jenny McCarthy and Nicole Scherzinger — gave Lachey some pointers for his new role. He said each *Alter Ego* panelist brings a unique musical perspective. "I like to think it's four of the most easygoing, laid back people," he said. "The chemistry happened pretty early on."

Lachey acknowledges the challenge of a show launching in 2021, with so much competition.

"*Alter Ego* is so unique and so unlike anything that's come before," he noted. "When you do a truly memorable thing, I think people will find it." — MM





# THE WATCHMAN

Senior content producer Michael Malone's look at the programming scene



By Michael Malone  
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## 'The Conners' Goes Live, And You Can Too

ABC starts season four of *The Conners* on Sept. 22 with a bang, with live episodes for both the East and West Coast. John Goodman, Sara Gilbert, Laurie Metcalf and Lecy Goranson are in the cast.

And you could be too. The show is holding a contest for fans, which will see lucky winners appear on the show — contacted on the phone by a cast member as the live episode rolls, and carrying on a convo as America watches.

Executive producer Bruce Helford called the live episode “a love letter to the fans,” and a celebration as the nation slowly climbs out of pandemic purgatory. Each of the two live broadcasts plan to feature four surprise guests. “I have no idea what we’re going to talk to them about,” Helford said. “That’s the kind of live TV that I like the most.”

Interested parties can go to BeAConner.com for more information.

Why does so much of America connect with the Conner clan? “There’s a certain trust the audience has with the actors,” Helford said. “They see their own families in the Conners.”

## Disney Channel Starts From Scratch on ‘Molly McGee’

*The Ghost and Molly McGee* premieres on Disney Channel Oct. 1. The animated show depicts Molly, a tween optimist, and Scratch, a grouchy ghost. A Scratch curse backfires, and he finds himself bound forever to Molly. She’s psyched. He is not.

Bill Motz and Bob Roth created the series,

and executive produce. Motz saw his upbeat personality emerge as the Molly character came to life. A pessimist, Roth saw the same thing happen with Scratch.

“Molly is an extrovert and Scratch is an introvert. She’s an optimist, he’s a pessimist,” Roth said. “She’s happy-go-lucky, he’s just happy to go anywhere else but here.”

Motz and Roth have been working together for over 30 years. Their work includes *Lego Star Wars: The Freemaker Adventures* and *The Penguins of Madagascar*.

*The Ghost and Molly McGee* has been in the works for 14 years. “We never found the right moment, the right circumstance where it just clicked,” said Motz.

That finally happened.

“There’s a sense of optimism and hope, and it felt like the right time for a show that leans into this kind of positivity,” Motz said.

Ashly Burch voices Molly and Dana Snyder handles Scratch. “As soon as [Burch] came into the room, it was, that is Molly,” Roth said.

Motz called Snyder “hilariously funny” and a deft improvisationalist. The chemistry between the ghost and Molly had to work for the show to work. “Dana and Ashly felt like best friends,” said Motz. “They had this camaraderie and chemistry.” ●

## *The Ghost and Molly McGee*



*The Conners*

## WATCH THIS ...



*Tacoma FD*

Season three of *Tacoma FD* premieres on truTV Sept. 16. Station 24 “is kicking ash and taking flames” in rainy Tacoma, according to tru. Kevin Heffernan and Steve Lemme star. Also on Sept. 16 is *The Premise* on FX on Hulu. From B.J. Novak, the show is a collection of half-hour standalone stories about the crazy times we live in. *The Premise* tackles guns, social media, police brutality and sex. ■ On Sept. 17, it’s season two of *The Morning*



*Muhammad Ali*

*Show on Apple TV Plus.* Jennifer Aniston and Reese Witherspoon are in the cast and executive produce the series. ■ On Sept. 19, Ken Burns premieres *Muhammad Ali* on PBS. The documentary airs across four nights. Besides boxing, the film touches on civil rights, politics, war, faith and “the definition of Blackness in the country,” Burns said. ■ On Sept. 22, *Survivor* returns to CBS after a long pandemic-related hiatus. As Jeff Probst says, “Survivors ready?”



*Survivor*



# WHY THE TRADITIONAL TV SEASON STILL (MOSTLY) MATTERS

Viewership isn't close to what it used to be, but broadcast networks have learned a few tricks over the years



By Michael Malone  
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**T**he TV season that has defined the role of television in viewers' lives, with splashy new shows premiering each day in the fall, is just about upon us. But in the era of glittery streaming series and viewers used to watching what they want when they want, one wonders what role the broadcast season, running late September until the spring with shows plugged into the Tuesdays-at-8 slot, still holds in 2021.

Further dimming the fall season glitter is the broadcast networks' years-long effort to premiere shows on all months of the calendar, meaning fewer debutants in September.

Not many would posit that the traditional TV season wields more than a glint of the wattage that it used to, but some believe the substantial audience broadcast still has — shrinking as it may be, and aging all the while — continues to be the envy of many TV platforms. True breakout hits on broadcast are rare, but a show that launches with decent ratings and develops a sizable viewing base (also a rarity) can mean major returns for the network.

"We have this incredible reach, we have this incredible platform," Fox Entertainment president of entertainment Michael Thorn said. "We can reach the passionate NFL audience and use that



synergy to have huge launches that create awareness and long-term viewing for our series."

Some industry insiders view the broadcast season as an outmoded advertising function. The broadcast nets show off their stuff at the upfront presentations in the spring, ad sales begin and the shows, and accompanying ads, debut in the fall. "All those things are less and less relevant," said Preston Beckman, former senior strategist at Fox and chairman of media consulting outfit The Beckman Group. "Network buys are part of larger buys now — they buy the streaming service in addition to the network. The networks are rolling out shows more year round, and the alternative networks are dropping shows 52 weeks a year."

Network executives acknowledge their diminished role in the modern

**Jorja Fox (l.) and William Petersen return to CBS and Sin City in CSI: Vegas. Below, Fox will bow drama *Our Kind of People*.**

TV landscape, but insist the traditional season isn't disappearing any time soon. "People like knowing that something special and new is coming," said Bruce Helford, executive producer of ABC comedy *The Conners*. "Knowing a new season is coming is like knowing when the new cars come out. It allows people to gather their excitement and plan on watching something special."

Besides a substantial viewership base, relative to most of the competition on cable and streaming, the networks also have sibling streaming platforms to help viewers catch up on a show their friends keep raving about, and to promote the flagship network's shows.

Mark Pedowitz, The CW chairman and CEO, called the fall season kickoff a "touchstone" for myriad viewers. "This annual rite of the broadcasting fall still exists for many," he said.

## A Season Scrambled

The 2020-2021 season had a patchwork feel to it, as networks scrambled amid the pandemic shutdown to get shows on the schedule. Networks typically launched just a couple new ones apiece, often holdovers from the midseason or summer, and filled in the blanks in a variety of ways, such as Fox airing L.A.'s *Finest*, which had aired on Spectrum Originals, and CBS borrowing *Star Trek: Discovery* from CBS All Access and *One Day at a Time* from Pop TV. CBS ate up schedule space with *Sunday Night Movies* last fall.

With countless shows sustaining COVID-induced delays, many





premiered weeks or even months later than they normally do, putting something of an asterisk next to fall 2020.

Fall 2021 is different. “Knock on wood, it feels much more normal,” said Steve Kern, senior VP, program planning & content strategy, NBCUniversal Television and Streaming. “I don’t think we’re at 100%, but we’re close to 100%.”

### ABC: Hoping for More Years of ‘Wonder’

ABC’s 2020-2021 season included newbies *Big Sky*, which starts season two Sept. 30, and drama *Rebel*, which was a straight-to-series order and won’t see season two on the network.

The new season starts Monday, Sept. 20, with *Dancing with the Stars*, which will see a first for the show in its 30 seasons as teen star JoJo Siwa will have a dance partner who is also female.

Network executives said the ABC schedule, coupled with on-demand viewing on Hulu, offers viewers every opportunity to fall for a new show. “Change is everywhere and audiences have more viewing opportunities than ever before,” said Jane Gould, executive VP, content research, insights and scheduling, Disney General Entertainment. “But the traditional TV season is still important to us, our advertisers and most importantly our viewers, who are accustomed to its cadence and look forward to the excitement of fall launch.”

Comedy *The Wonder Years*, featuring a Black middle-class family in Alabama in the late 1960s, starts Sept. 22. “We wanted to really take the opportunity to show a part of Black middle-class life that had not been seen before,” executive producer Saladin K. Patterson said.

Fred Savage, star of the original show that ran 1988 to 1993 on ABC, is an executive producer and director on the remake.

Leading out of *The Wonder Years* is *The Conners*, which kicks off season four with a live episode (see *The Watchman*, page 9). Helford called the episode “a love letter to the fans” after what they’ve lived through over the past 18 months.



**At top, CBS spinoff *FBI: International*. Top right, NBC drama debutant *Ordinary Joe*. Below, ABC primetime stalwart *The Conners*.**

New stuff on ABC also includes *Queens*, about four women in their 40s who aim to recapture their fame as a hip-hop group back in the '90s.

### CBS: Alphabet Soup Of Spinoffs

Shows CBS launched last season include comedy *B Positive* and dramas *The Equalizer* and *Clarice*. *B Positive* and *The Equalizer* will return, while CBS has not announced the fate of *Clarice*.

New shows include spinoffs.

*NCIS: Hawaii* debuts Sept. 20, *FBI: International* is on Sept. 21 and *CSI: Vegas* starts Oct. 6. Kelly Kahl, CBS entertainment president, said the spinoffs come with built-in audiences from their progenitors. “Business-wise, they’re very smart for us,” he told B+C/Multichannel News earlier this

summer. “They travel well internationally, they sell well domestically. They’re good sources of streams and subscribers for Paramount Plus.”

*CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* premiered in 2000. *CSI: Vegas* brings back stars William Petersen and Jorja Fox. “We expect that to be a hook for viewers to come back to see—a couple of very, very popular characters in TV history,” said Kahl.

CBS shows the Emmys Sept. 19, with Cedric the Entertainer hosting. His comedy *The Neighborhood* starts a day later.

### Fox: Big Swings Include ‘Big Leap’

Fox’s 2020-2021 rookies included tech thriller *Next* and soapy Kim Cattrall drama *Filthy Rich*, both canceled.

Fox gets things going in the fall with



the season premiere of 9-1-1 Sept. 20, followed by new drama *The Big Leap*, about a group of down-on-their-luck characters attempting to change their lives by participating in a reality dance show that reimagines *Swan Lake*. Thorn called the show “incredibly emotional and very funny and overwhelmingly positive.”

“We think that positivity can be contagious,” he added. “It’s what we all want to experience right now.”

New drama *Our Kind of People*, about an affluent African-American community on Martha’s Vineyard, begins Sept. 21. The Lee Daniels series “looks at a part of Black culture that has never been seen on television,” said Thorn.

Unscripted hit *The Masked Singer* starts Sept. 22, leading into singing competition series *Alter Ego*, with Alanis Morissette, Nick Lachey, Grimes and will.i.am as judges (see Lead-in, page 8).

*Thursday Night Football* starts Oct. 7.

### NBC: Hoping for Extraordinary Things from ‘Joe’

New shows on NBC this past season include comedies *Kenan* and *Young Rock* and drama *Law & Order: Organized Crime*, all of which are returning.

Debuting shows include dramas *Ordinary Joe*, centered around the idea of how choices made in a single moment can alter the course of life forever, starting Sept. 20 and starring James Wolk. Kern called it “a *Sliding Doors* take



**Top:** The CW’s missing-persons drama *4400*. **At right,** ABC’s reboot of *The Wonder Years*. **Below,** ABC’s hip-hop drama *Queens*.



on a program.” *La Brea*, on Sept. 28, is about a massive sinkhole that opens in Los Angeles, and the dangerous primeval land that those who fall into it find.

*Sunday Night Football* returned with a Thursday game Sept. 9, then Bears-Rams Sept. 12.

Smash drama *This Is Us* returns in the midseason for its sixth and final season.

### The CW Goes Seven Nights

The CW began its previous season in January, with its fall schedule featuring CBS All Access drama *Tell Me a Story* and Canadian drama *Coroner*, among other rentals, with mainstays like *All American* and *Riverdale* following in early 2021. Rookie originals last season include *Superman & Lois* and *Walker*, which both earned sophomore seasons.

The CW season starts Oct. 1 with *Penn & Teller: Fool Us*. New shows include *4400*, about 4,400 people who vanished across many years, then reappear with no memory of what happened; a reboot of Nickelodeon competition series *The Legends of the Hidden Temple* and another competition series based on a U.K. format, *Killer Camp*.

The *4400* had aired on USA Network years ago. Pedowitz called the new *4400* “a look at how things change, how things didn’t change, and how things need to change.”

The CW went straight to series on drama *Tom Swift*. The network programs Saturday nights for the first time starting Oct. 9 with *Whose Line Is It Anyway?* and *World’s Funniest Animals*. “It gives us the opportunity to promote Sunday and Monday without having a day in between,” Pedowitz said.

### Beyond Broadcast

Beyond ABC, CBS, Fox, NBC and The CW, fall TV premieres include the series starter for B.J. Novak anthology series *The Premise* on FX on Hulu, and Dan Brown’s *The Lost Symbol* on Peacock, Sept. 16; season two of *The Morning Show* on Apple TV Plus Sept. 17; the Ken Burns documentary *Muhammad Ali* on PBS and *The Circus* on Showtime, Sept. 19; and the final season of *Goliath* on Amazon Prime Sept. 24.

Back on broadcast, Beckman sees the collective schedule as “safe, recognizable programming,” and “programming you’ve seen before, just in a different city, or about a different public servant within the city.”

He doesn’t sense a breakout. But network execs remain hopeful. Kern thinks back to his time at ABC, when *Lost*, *Grey’s Anatomy* and *Desperate Housewives* all premiered in 2004-2005. That was a different era in TV, but broadcasters have their fingers crossed. “If you market it right and promote it right, people get interested in it,” Kern said. “If everything lines up the right way, the next thing you know, you’re talking about the next *This Is Us*, the next *The Masked Singer*.”

Thorn said there is “no bigger storefront” than the one that broadcast TV offers, meaning more than enough viewers exist to turn a well-produced and marketed show into a hit. “I do believe, where we are right now culturally, there’s a huge opportunity for a hit television show,” Thorn said. “The audience is craving something new and different, and we are taking big swings that are going for that new and different.” ●





THE  
ROAD AHEAD  
HAS  
ALWAYS BEEN PAVED  
BY  
PIONEERS

We are proud to welcome the Class of 2021 entrepreneurs, cable chiefs, programmers, technicians, engineers, agencies, financiers, researchers, marketers, trade journalists, associations and ad sales executives to the Cable TV Pioneers Family.

Mark Adams

Michael Adams

Richard Amell

Peter Barton

Pat Baughman

Tracy Baumgartner

Jack Capparell

Sherita Ceasar

Kristin Dolan

Dale Elifrits

Diego Gastaldi

John Higginbotham

Jim Holanda

Dick Kirsche

Chris Lammers

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Wonya Lucas

Amy Maclean

Jim McCauley

Tom McMillin

John Roos

Bob Scanlon

Patsy Smullin

Tom Umstead



CABLE TV  
PIONEERS



# CABLE TV PIONEERS



## Cable Pioneers Get Personal In Atlanta

Live ceremony ahead of Cable-Tec Expo will again be streamed, too

The Cable TV Pioneers, a group founded in 1966 to celebrate the entrepreneurial accomplishments of the men and women who built the cable industry, has grown to more than 700 members. The newest members will be inducted on Monday, Oct. 11, during a ceremony the evening before the SCTE/ISBE Cable-Tec Expo opens in Atlanta. The ceremony returns to in-person status after being held virtually a year ago.

"Just as our industry rose to the challenge of keeping America connected this past year, these men and women continued to make significant contributions on their business, home and community fronts," Pioneer chairman Dave Fellows said when the class was revealed in June. "The

Class of 2021 exemplifies the Pioneer spirit and commitment to do the best no matter the circumstances."

Last year's Pioneers ceremony was the first-ever cable trade TV show broadcast and streamed, with credit going to C-SPAN co-CEOs and Pioneers Susan Swain and Rob Kennedy, produced by New England Sports Network, led by NESN President and Pioneer Sean McGrail.

The group intends to stream the Monday, Oct. 11 program on YouTube and on CableTVPioneers.com, which will continue to play the show after the event.

Here are brief profiles of the 24 new inductees in the Cable TV Pioneers. For more about the group and the event, please visit [cabletvpioneers.com](http://cabletvpioneers.com). ●



### Mark Adams

is Director, Outside Plant Engineering & Architectures for Cox Communications, a position he has held for the past three and a half

years. Before joining Cox, he was a Principal of SFA Technical Services Group, providing consulting services to cable operators and vendors, including Comcast and Cox. Prior to forming SFA Services, he spent 29 years with Scientific Atlanta/Cisco Systems, rising through the ranks to VP of Applications and Sales Engineers, VP of Quality and VP of SciCare Services.

A member of SCTE for three decades, Adams was elevated to the position of Senior Member in 2018 and currently serves as President of the Chattahoochee Chapter along with several national committees.



### Michael B. Adams

is President of Broadband Semantics Consulting. From 1993-2001, he was Senior Project Engineer and VP,

Network Architecture with Time Warner Cable.

In 2001, he was named VP of Road Runner Engineering. In 2003, he joined Terayon Communications as VP, Technology & Architecture, and in 2006 was named VP, Systems Architecture for Tandberg Television.

Adams is the author of *Open Cable Architecture* (2001 SCTE Book of the Year) and is a co-author of *Modern Cable Television Technology 2nd Edition* with Jim Farmer and David Large. Adams holds nine communications-related patents, focused on network scaling, video inversion techniques and bandwidth optimization.



### Richard Amell

began his 40-year-plus cable career with Cox Communications in March of 1970. He was the Chief Technician for Cox systems in

Indiana and New York before moving to the company's corporate drafting and design department in Atlanta.

Richard moved to MetroVision in September of 1979 as VP, Engineering, where he remained for more than 15 years before accepting a similar position with Time Warner Cable's National Division. In October of 2010, he was named Corporate VP, Video Engineering & Operations for Bright House Networks.

He has held a number of leadership positions with SCTE, including five years as the Chattahoochee Chapter President.





### Peter Barton

was Adviser and Personal Assistant to John Malone at Tele-Communications Inc. from 1982-1986. From 1986-1991, he served as President of the Home

Shopping Network (later QVC). From 1991-1997, he served as Co-Founder, President and CEO of Liberty Media, shepherding and investing in Discovery Communications, Time Warner, Turner, Starz, Fox Sports, HSN and BET. On Sept. 8, 2002, he died of cancer. He would now be 70 years old.



### Patricia Baughman

is the sole National Advertising Sales Manager for Cable One, working there since March of 2008. Pat

began her cable journey in 1980 as Production Manager with Storer Communications in the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex. In July of 1984, she joined and spent four years at TV Guide before spending 15 years with Lifetime as Regional VP, Distribution & Affiliate Relations. At Cable One, she has received the President's Club Award for Exceptional Sales Performance on eight occasions over the last 12 years and this year, the coveted Sales Leadership Award.



### Tracy Baumgartner

is VP of Business Process Effectiveness for Comcast Cable, leading the development and implementation of the

company's environmental sustainability strategy. Starting at Mind Extension University in 1992, she moved to Jones InterCable's corporate headquarters in 1996. She joined Comcast in 2002 as Public Relations Manager. Following Comcast's acquisition of AT&T Broadband in 2002, she became VP of Communications for Comcast's West Division. In 2011, she moved to Philadelphia to help lead the corporation's philanthropic program as Executive Director of Community Investment, then helped create the corporation's environmental sustainability program.



### John (Jack) A. Capparell

joined Service Electric Cable in 1965 as a technician 57 years ago. Through the years, he has been promoted from

Technical Service Manager, Operations Manager, Systems Manager and has served as General Manager since 1984.

During his career he has been involved with many early industry developments including Service Electric's 1976 launch of HBO.

He has served as an officer of the Pennsylvania Cable Association, now BCAP, for eight years and was the Chairman of the Regulatory Affairs Committee and the Chairman of the State Pole Attachment committee.



### Sherita Ceasar

is Senior VP, Technology Environments & Strategy for Comcast NBCUniversal. She had previously been the company's Senior VP of

National Video Deployment Engineering. She began her cable journey in 1996 with Scientific Atlanta after eight years with Motorola's Paging Division. While with SA, she served as VP, Quality Assurance and VP of Sci-Care Broadband Services.

In May of 2004, she joined Charter Communications as VP, General Manager of Georgia Key Market Area Region. Later, she joined Comcast as VP of Product Engineering; she has been there for more than 14 years. In her executive role with the Employee Resource Group of the Black Employees Network (BEN), she provides strategic guidance and support for members.



### Kristin Dolan

is Founder and CEO of 605, a leading television and cross-platform measurement, analytics and attribution company. She founded

605 in 2016, bringing nearly 30 years of media and entertainment experience to her role with the company.

She began her career in 1990 at Rainbow Media, now AMC Networks, where she held a variety of sales and marketing positions throughout the years. She later served as Chief Operating Officer of Cablevision Systems, leading all of the company's cable operations. She also oversaw Cablevision Media Sales, the company's advertising sales division.

She was recognized as a Multichannel News Wonder Woman in 2004 and was a recipient of the NCTA's Distinguished Vanguard Award for Leadership in 2016.



### Dale Elifrits

is Regional VP, Network Engineering for Comcast's Greater Philadelphia Region, a position he has held for the past five years. From

January of 2007 to August of 2010, he was Tech Operations VP for the company's Houston Region. Prior to that Dale was Tech Operations VP for the company's Western New England Region.

His early cable adventures were as a lineman for a family contracting business, where he spent three years building out cable plant before joining Heritage Cablevision in 1983 as a Technical Supervisor and Operations Manager. After TCI acquired Heritage, then later sold to AT&T, he became Director of Engineering for AT&T Broadband in South Puget Sound and eventually Director, Technical Operations for AT&T Broadband in Dallas.



### Diego Martin Gastaldi

is Managing Director with VMware. Prior to joining VMware in May of 2020, Diego was Managing Director of

Cloud IT with Cisco Systems. His industry journey began in June of 1992 as a Field Engineer with General Instrument's Jerrold Communications unit. He would later join ADC Communications as Senior Regional Manager for Latin America.

In September of 1998, he was named Scientific Atlanta's Director of Business Development for Europe, Latin America and the Asia-Pacific Region.



# CABLE TV PIONEERS



**John Higginbotham Jr.** is Executive VP and Chief Operating Officer of ACA Connects. He previously served as Executive VP, Member Services and Chief of Staff.

In 1994, he began his cable career operating the local origination channels for the Frankfort Plant Board (FPB) in Kentucky. He then managed the launch of ad sales and marketing and, in 1997, added video programming and regulatory responsibilities. He moved to the operations side in 2000. In 2002, John was promoted to Telecom Superintendent and managed the day-to-day activities of the telecom system at FPB. In 2013, he moved into the administrative role of Assistant G.M. He retired from FPB in 2017.



**Jim Holanda** is a veteran of 33 years in the cable industry having begun his career as a Technician with Comcast Cable in 1988. He joined Charter

Communications in 1998 and became a Regional VP, then moved to Patriot Media in 2003 as President. He is CEO of Astound Broadband, which includes Patriot Media, RCN, Grande Communications and Wave Broadband.

He has been actively involved in industry organizations and associations throughout his career and is a current member of the NCTC Board of Directors. A former member of the Board of the Missouri Cable & Telecommunications Association and Mid-Atlantic Association, he has assisted the ACA Connects team with its industry lobbying efforts in Washington, D.C.

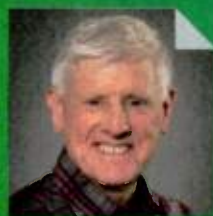


**Richard (Dick) Kirsche**

He began his nearly 55-year cable journey as VP, Engineering with Spectrum Cable in western Massachusetts.

He had spent the previous 10 years designing broadcast transmitters and satellite ground stations. When Spectrum was acquired by Colony Communications in March of 1975, he was named the MSO's Director of Engineering.

He moved to Greater Media's Cable division in January of 1982 as VP, Engineering where he was instrumental in the company's franchising efforts in Massachusetts, Michigan, New York and Pennsylvania. He moved to RCN in June of 2000 as Director, Video Network Technology before moving to Comcast as Director of Video Engineering in 2005. He formed Kirsche Consulting in 2010 but continued working with Comcast to refine their work on making set-tops more sufficient.



**Chris Lammers**

He is the Chief Operating Officer and Senior VP of Member Development for CableLabs. He had come to CableLabs in 1997

from Western Communications where he had been President and CEO. He was previously Senior VP and General Counsel for Western. Prior to his 11 years with Western, he was Associate Counsel and Partner at Cooper, White & Cooper, focusing on mergers and acquisitions and other initiatives for the firm's cable clients.

Today at CableLabs, he is responsible for

operations member development and international relationships. Under his leadership, CableLabs has tripled its memberships in 35 countries in North America, Latin America, Europe and Asia.



**Filemon Lopez**

He was Senior VP, Strategic Operations for Comcast prior to his retirement in July of 2016. He had previously served nine years as

Comcast's Southeast Florida Regional VP and earlier as President of Comcast University. He began his career in the cable industry in 1983 as Production Manager for the Advertising Rep firm Phoenix Cable. In 1985, he was named Advertising Sales Manager for Storer's Dade-Broward, Florida region, building that territory over the next three years before moving to Georgia to head Cox Cable's Mid-State Advertising Interconnect.



**Wonya Lucas**

She is President and CEO for Crown Media Family Network. She began her cable career in 1994 with Turner, as a Senior Manager in

Corporate Marketing. She was later promoted to Director and then to VP, Entertainment Marketing.

In 1997, she was named VP, Business Operations for TNT, TBS and Turner Classic Movies. She then became the Senior VP President, Marketing and Research for CNN Worldwide.

She moved to the Weather Channel in 2002 as Executive VP, Strategic Marketing and then General Manager. She later joined Discovery Communications as Executive VP, Chief Marketing Officer and then Chief Operating Officer for Discovery and Science Channels. In 2011, she became the President and CEO of TV One; she founded Lucas Strategic Consulting in 2013 before accepting the position of President and CEO of Public Broadcasting Atlanta.





### Amy Maclean

has been with Cablefax and Access Intelligence for the past 21 years. She joined the company in 2000 as Editor and is currently

Editorial Director, a position she assumed in November of 2015 after serving five years as Editor-in-Chief. Prior to signing on with Access Intelligence, Amy was a news reporter in Atlanta, Georgia, and Montgomery, Alabama.



### Jim McCauley

is a Principal and President of dB Communications Sales Services. After a tour in the Merchant Marine in the mid 1970s, he

joined Henkles & McCoy as a Field Engineer. In 1983, he moved into Sales and Operations with a tower firm, then in 1987 to Director of Sales for the Jerrold division of General Instrument, where his portfolio included planning and implementing a 3,500-mile new build in Sacramento.

In 1994, he purchased dB Communications, a manufacturer's representative for multiple lines of optical cable, RF and digital electronics and ethernet test equipment.

An SCTE member throughout his career, McCauley and dB Communications have provided financial support and participated in cable events such as SCTE's "Cable Games" where he served as a judge on many occasions.



### Thomas McMillin

McMillin's introduction to cable television was in 1983, while with Arthur Andersen on

assignment with Cencom Cable. He subsequently joined the company as VP, Finance, Corporate Development and spent five years at Cencom before joining Crown Cable as VP, Corporate Development. In 1993,

he joined Marcus Cable as Executive VP, Chief Financial Officer.

He rejoined the industry in 2006 when he became Executive VP, Chief Operating Officer of Suddenlink Communications. He served in this leadership role, and on the board of directors, successfully growing Suddenlink to employ more than 6,500 team members while serving 1.5 million customers and enjoying one of the industry's highest customer satisfaction scores.



### John Erick Roos

is Executive VP, Corporate Communications and Research for INSP, LLC. His cable journey began in August 1977

with the Christian Broadcasting Network, where he helped launch what became the Family Channel. His positions ranged from Director of Marketing Services to VP Marketing. He joined INSP in January 1994 as Vice President, Marketing, after serving three years as Executive VP with Z Music Television.



### Robert S. Scanlon

Scanlon's career has spanned decades in the creation, launch or rebranding of multiple cable programming

ventures. Scanlon has developed groundbreaking production techniques and programming strategies that have raised the value of cable programming.

His work has been recognized with nine national Emmy Awards. Most recently, he served as President of Velocity Motor Trend, a division of Discovery Inc.

As a consultant with the National Football League, Scanlon was instrumental in the launching of NFL Network, including the service's branding and logos, as well as its initial programming content and scheduling strategies.



### Patricia (Patsy) Smullin

is President of California Oregon Broadcasting, which includes ownership of cable systems,

broadcast stations and a digital production company. She has been with the company since her graduation from college. Smullin has worked in management and ownership in the cable industry from the mid-1960s to 2017.

She was VP and part owner of Southern Oregon Cable Television in Oregon and Humboldt Bay Cable Television in Northern California from 1973-1982. She was later President and owner of Crestview Cable from 1982-2017.

She was president of the Oregon Cable Television Association and the Northwest Cable Television Association, covering Oregon, Idaho and Washington.



### R. Thomas Umstead

is Senior Content Producer for Broadcasting+Cable and Multichannel News.

Umstead joined the Multichannel News staff in 1987 and has served as the publication's Programming Editor and Pay-Per-View and Sports Editor, as well as its Multimedia Editor.

Previous assignments include Sports Editor for Cablevision magazine and contributing editor with Video Business magazine.

He has served on the Board of NAMIC and has worked with numerous cable industry organizations including WICT, the Emma Bowen Foundation, NCTA, T. Howard Foundation and Future Now Media Foundation.

He has served as a moderator and panelist for CTAM, NATPE and the Walter Kaitz Foundation and is a 20-year member of the Television Critics Association. A tireless community advocate, Umstead served on a local NAACP chapter and with the National Association of Black Journalists.



# Emmys 2021: What We Watched During the Pandemic

The year's best shows taught us about our world while letting us escape it



By Paige Albiniak  
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@PaigeA

From Ted Lasso's relentless optimism to *The Underground Railroad*'s devastating storytelling, from *Bridgerton*'s frothy romance to *The Handmaid's Tale*'s wrenching violence, this year's

Emmy-nominated shows all reflect the constantly changing culture in their own unique ways. In a time where audiences mostly consume their entertainment on demand from their homes, these are the shows that stood out.

The outstanding drama nominees reveal the true range of television in 2021, with romance, science fiction, superheroes, family drama and historical drama all in play.

## Stacked Field for Drama

Netflix's *The Crown* — with 24 nominations in 2021, including for outstanding drama series — is the favorite to finally win the top drama Emmy after the show has been nominated for each of its four seasons. Season four began telling the tortured story of Prince Charles and Princess Diana with lead actor and actress nominees Josh O'Connor and Emma Corrin channeling their royal counterparts through nuanced performances.

While season four of *The Crown* is set in London in the '80s, the story it told was remarkably resonant, especially as Charles and Diana's son, Prince Harry, and his wife, Meghan Markle, struggled to redefine their own relationship with Buckingham Palace.

Disney Plus's *The Mandalorian*, in season two, tied *The*

*Crown* with 24 nominations, many of which are in the craft and technical categories.

Coming in with 21 nominations is Hulu's *The Handmaid's Tale*, a show that continues to feel prescient as politics divides the country. *The Handmaid's Tale* was named outstanding drama in its first season, which premiered in April 2017.

"*The Handmaid's Tale* came to life as we were seeing the rise of the far right throughout the world, and then [Donald] Trump made it to the White House," executive producer Warren Littlefield said. "Hulu decided that they had a show that spoke to the moment and they promoted us in the Super Bowl. In many ways, we've been seen as a voice of the resistance against what we were experiencing here in the U.S. and what people were feeling throughout the world."

In season four, *Handmaid Offred* (star and executive producer Elisabeth Moss) is dealing with the ramifications of helping many of Gilead's children escape across the border to Canada and trying to escape herself, even though that means leaving her own children.

"June's journey to freedom as she is getting through that compound where bodies are just desperate to get out — when that boat pulls away, in our visual narrative, people are throwing themselves to try and touch that freedom, which June is fortunate enough to get," Littlefield said. "We're living a version of that as we look at Afghanistan and realize what all those people are going through. We don't predict the future... [but] we seem to echo the world that we

inhabit. I hope we bring a sense of the fight against those who oppress us and against authoritarian regimes, both foreign and domestic."

Also nominated for best drama

series are Netflix's *Bridgerton*, HBO's *Lovecraft Country*, FX's *Pose*, Amazon's *The Boys* and NBC's *This Is Us*, which returns to the category after missing in 2020. All of those shows in their own ways deal with issues of race, class, identity and social justice.

Lead actress in a drama series is a stacked category, including awards heavy-hitters Olivia Colman, playing Queen Elizabeth in *The Crown*, and *The Handmaid's Tale*'s Moss, who won the Emmy in this category in the show's first season. Even with those two in the mix, the front-runners are two Emmy newcomers: *The Crown*'s Corrin, who won the Golden Globe, and *Pose*'s M.J. Rodriguez, who made history as the first transgender actress to be nominated in this category. Also nominated are *In Treatment*'s three-time Emmy winner Uzo Aduba and *Lovecraft Country*'s Jurnee Smollett.

Josh O'Connor, like his *Crown* counterpart Emma Corrin, has a good shot at taking the win for lead actor in a drama series, with Billy Porter of FX's *Pose*, a former winner in this category, also considered a contender. *Bridgerton*'s instant star, Regé-Jean Page, could also grab a win here. Also nominated are *Perry Mason*'s Matthew Rhys, who won an Emmy in 2018 for FX's *The Americans*; *Lovecraft Country*'s Jonathan Majors, who is about to star as the next major villain in the Marvel Universe; and two-time Emmy winner Sterling K. Brown for *This Is Us*.

## 'Lasso' a Comedy Favorite

Apple TV Plus's sunny sensation *Ted Lasso* is almost the universal pick to sweep the comedy categories. Like Schitt's *Creek* last year, *Ted Lasso*, which was developed out of a popular branded content piece for NBC Sports, provided audiences with a much-needed break from the unrelenting bad news of politics and the pandemic.

Also nominated outstanding comedy series are ABC's perennially nominated *Black-ish*, Netflix's *Cobra Kai*, which it picked up from YouTube and



Ted Lasso



just renewed for season five ahead of the season four debut; Netflix's *Emily in Paris*; Hulu's *Pen15* and Netflix's *The Kominsky Method*.

All that *Lasso* love also puts series star, co-creator and executive producer Jason Sudeikis in the hot seat to repeat his Golden Globe victory with an Emmy. Much of *Lasso*'s supporting cast is also nominated, including Hannah Waddingham, Juno Temple, Brett Goldstein, co-creator Brendan Hunt, Nick Mohammad and Jeremy Swift.

Joining Sudeikis in the lead actor in a comedy category are *Black-ish*'s Anthony Anderson, *Kenan*'s Kenan Thompson, *Shameless*'s William H. Macy and *The Kominsky Method*'s Michael Douglas.

A late entry to the comedy field is HBO Max's *Hacks*, starring lead actress nominee Jean Smart and supporting actress nominee Hannah Einbinder. *Hacks*, about an aging comedian and the cynical young woman who helps her freshen her act, premiered on HBO Max on May 13, just before the Emmy eligibility deadline closed on May 31. Nominated alongside *Hacks* is HBO Max sibling *The Flight Attendant*, starring and executive produced by Kaley Cuoco.

Besides Smart and Cuoco, also nominated are *Black-ish*'s Tracee Ellis Ross, *Shrill*'s Aidy Bryant and *Mom*'s Allison Janney, a previous winner for this role. Side note: *Saturday Night Live* cast members past and present cleaned up at this year's Emmy nominations, with Thompson and Bryant also nominated in the supporting categories for *Saturday Night Live*, along with Bowen Yang, Kate McKinnon and Cecily Strong. Filling out the supporting actor category is *Hacks*'s Carl Clemons-Hopkins and *The Kominsky Method*'s Faul Reiser. On the actress side is Rosie Perez for *The Flight Attendant*.

Because of their limited purviews, limited series are often the most incisive of the scripted series, telling intense stories quickly and with purpose.

Limited series is the only one of the major three series categories that seems to be a true toss-up. Netflix's *The Queen's Gambit* won Golden Globes for limited series and for lead actress Anya Taylor-Joy. But the chess-focused drama didn't have to face HBO's *I May Destroy You*, which won a Peabody and was considered by many critics to be 2020's best show

but was ignored by the Hollywood Foreign Press, or HBO's *Mare of Easttown*, which offered powerhouse performances from a trio of actresses: Kate Winslet in the title role, Jean Smart as *Mare*'s mom and Julianne Nicholson as *Mare*'s best friend.

All three series — as well as Amazon's *The Underground Railroad*, based on Colson Whitehead's best-selling novel and created, directed and executive produced by Oscar winner Barry Jenkins (*Moonlight*), and Disney Plus's genre-bending *WandaVision* — are in the mix for the win.

### 'Mare' a Complex Contender

*Mare of Easttown*, starring and executive produced by Kate Winslet, tells the story of a woman who's lived her whole life in a blue-collar town in Pennsylvania and has followed in her father's footsteps to become a detective. As the story unfolds, so does the trauma that *Mare* has had to endure as she married and raised children herself. The story also includes many twists and turns as *Mare* tries to solve two cases that have affected her personally.

"It's never been on my mind to make something relevant, it's not how I go about crafting stories," show creator Brad Ingelsby said. "What I try to do is write something, a character, a world with as much honesty as I can and as many specifics as I can and hope that if I've achieved that, then the honesty of that world will come through and impact people emotionally. What we were always trying to do with *Mare* was to make it as honest a portrait of a community as we could. We feel that if we portray people with honesty and complexity, then the audience will believe in these people, believe in this place and get immersed in the world."

Four out of five of this year's limited-series nominees are heavily driven by the performances of their lead actresses: *I May Destroy You*'s Michaela Coel, *Mare*'s Kate Winslet, *The Queen's Gambit*'s Anya Taylor-Joy and *WandaVision*'s Elizabeth Olsen are all nominated, as is Cynthia Erivo for Nat Geo's *Genius: Aretha*.

Among the men, only *WandaVision*'s Paul Bettany is nominated along with the series in which he starred. Also nominated are *Hamilton*'s Lin-Manuel Miranda and Leslie Odom Jr., *The Undoing*'s Hugh Grant and *Halston*'s Ewan McGregor.

The 73rd Primetime Emmy Awards, hosted by Cedric the Entertainer, will air Sunday, Sept. 19, on CBS. ●



### OUTSTANDING DRAMA SERIES

Netflix	<i>Bridgerton</i>
HBO	<i>Lovecraft Country</i>
FX	<i>Pose</i>
Amazon	<i>The Boys</i>
Netflix	<i>The Crown</i>
Hulu	<i>The Handmaid's Tale</i>
Disney Plus	<i>The Mandalorian</i>
NBC	<i>This Is Us</i>

### OUTSTANDING COMEDY SERIES

ABC	<i>Black-ish</i>
Netflix	<i>Cobra Kai</i>
Netflix	<i>Emily in Paris</i>
HBO	<i>Hacks</i>
Hulu	<i>Pen15</i>
Apple TV Plus	<i>Ted Lasso</i>
HBO Max	<i>The Flight Attendant</i>
Netflix	<i>The Kominsky Method</i>

### OUTSTANDING LIMITED SERIES

HBO	<i>I Will Destroy You</i>
HBO	<i>Mare of Easttown</i>
Amazon	<i>The Underground Railroad</i>
Netflix	<i>The Queen's Gambit</i>
Disney Plus	<i>WandaVision</i>



*The Crown*



# Programmers Put Their Faith In Faith-Friendly Shows

Scripted, music programs take on spiritual themes in bid for viewership



By R. Thomas Umstead  
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Several cable networks are putting their faith in spiritual and gospel music-themed shows to reach viewers looking for uplifting and positive television content to help through difficult times.

From new scripted series including streaming service ALLBLK's *Covenant* to original movies like Lifetime's Emmy-nominated *Robin Roberts Presents: Mahalia*, faith-based shows are finding an audience with viewers who are looking for more spiritual-themed shows in the midst of everyday struggles, including the ongoing pandemic, executives said.

"We want our audience, which has a strong spiritual side, to see the relevance, but what we really want to do is tap into the need for hope and community," Lifetime executive VP of scripted programming Tonya Lopez said.

Many recent faith-themed shows from cable and streaming services have been unscripted, Bible-focused programs such as History's 2013 *The Bible* and 2019's *Jesus: His Life*, as well as National Geographic Channel's 2016 *The Story of God with Morgan Freeman*. Now, with networks looking for new, diverse content that appeals to both general and niche audiences, faith-based scripted shows are attempting to gain traction on programming lineups.

Executives said creating a successful scripted content series based on religious and spiritual themes can be daunting. Writers must navigate



telling, but not necessarily preaching, the *Good News* and make the content compelling enough to compete against traditional drama shows.

"It is a little hard trying to figure out how faith-based [programming] is going to look and feel in this secular world," Kay Singleton, creator of ALLBLK's *Covenant*, said last month at the service's Television Critics Association Summer Press Tour session.

*Covenant* will reimagine classic Bible-themed stories as they might take place in the modern world to show how sacred lessons of faith and love fit into today's society, according to the streaming service. The show is not overtly religious but brings spiritual themes into a

**Above, Danielle Brooks in Lifetime's *Robin Roberts Presents: Mahalia*. Below, Barry Watson in the network's *Highway to Heaven* reboot.**

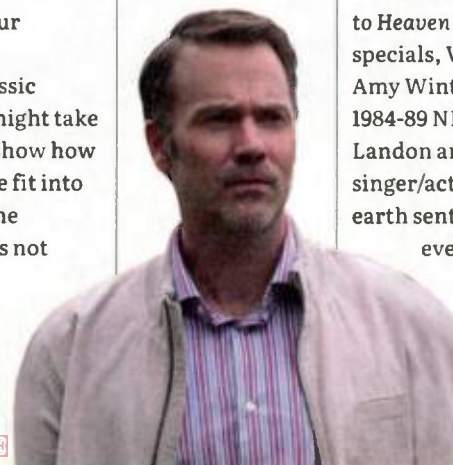
contemporary environment that's more familiar to today's viewer, Singleton said.

"It's not scripture heavy on the surface, but rather welcoming and not polarizing," she said. "It'll appeal to all different kinds of crowds."

## Back on the 'Highway'

Lifetime will look to reboot *Highway to Heaven* as part of a series of movie specials, VP and head of programming Amy Winter said. A reimagining of the 1984-89 NBC series starring Michael Landon and Victor French, it stars singer/actress Jill Scott as an angel on earth sent to help people through their everyday problems and situations.

Lifetime hopes viewers





will be receptive to a faith-based show given the travails many people are going through, particularly with the ongoing pandemic. "Everybody needs something that I think that can lift them up and maybe help them move beyond ... being stuck in the past," *Highway to Heaven* co-star Barry Watson said at the TCA tour last month.

*Highway to Heaven* doesn't speak specifically to any particular religion or faith, Scott said, but offers spiritual messages to tackle contemporary issues. "It's for everybody who is looking for light in the dark or ... for a reminder that faith still exists, and that the creator — my boss, your boss, our boss — is still very much present," she said at TCA.

Industry executives say shows such as OWN's *Greenleaf* have helped pave the way for viewers to see the issues surrounding church, religion and faith through the lens of a dramatic, scripted series. *Greenleaf* creator Craig Wright said the series found an audience, particularly Black women, who wanted to experience the church and faith from a different perspective.

*Greenleaf* ended its five-year run in 2020 as OWN's most-watched scripted series. The network is planning to launch a spinoff show based on *Greenleaf* star Lynn Whitfield's character Lady Mae, Wright said.

"Spirituality is hard to depict on camera," he said. "Our intention with *Greenleaf* was to start

a conversation about the black church, and from the way the audience came along, obviously that was a conversation that was waiting to happen."

### In Tune with Music

Programmers have also turned to gospel music-themed originals to deliver powerful notes to viewers. BET Plus has teamed with gospel music icon Kirk Franklin and producer DeVon Franklin to create a new drama series, *Kingdom Business*, which will follow the life of a gospel singing star determined to guard her family and its many secrets to retain her place on the throne.

Lifetime featured two of the most prominent names in gospel music in Mahalia Jackson and *The Clark Sisters* as the subjects of original movies that have generated strong viewership and industry accolades.

*The Clark Sisters: First Ladies of Gospel* debuted in April 2020 to 2.7 million viewers, the most watched Lifetime original movie since 2016, while *Robin Roberts Presents: Mahalia* — which premiered in April 2021 — was nominated for a 2021 Emmy Award for Outstanding Television Movie.

"Mahalia and *Clark Sisters* are biopics about women who our audience had heard of but didn't know their full story," Lopez said. "Mahalia, *Clark Sisters* and *Highway to Heaven* offer hope and positivity in a world that so desperately needs that energy." ●



REVIEW

## AMERICAN RUST

(Showtime, Starting Sunday, Sept. 12, at 10 p.m. ET)

VETERAN COP, PLAYED by a big-name actor, working in a downtrodden Pennsylvania town for decades, bending the rules when necessary. It worked really well for HBO with Kate Winslet in *Mare of Easttown*. It works well here, too, with Jeff Daniels (and co-star Maura Tierney) in Showtime's *American Rust*, from the novel by Philipp Meyer.

Daniels is Del Harris, an aging Army combat veteran and police officer in fictional Buell, Pennsylvania, home to rusted-out former steel mills and foreclosure auctions. Del, who is a little on edge due to weaning himself off PTSD meds, is romantically interested in Grace (Tierney), a divorced single mom who works a sewing machine at a dressmaker shop and is trying to bring in a labor union, *Norma Rae* style. Del is gruff but can be funny: I counted more humorous lines in the first 10 minutes of episode one than were in all of *Mare*.

A homicide happens in those first 10 minutes, too, one that might involve Tierney's son, Billy. That presents problems for Del because Billy is a good kid who unfortunately already has a criminal record for assault over a fight he tried to avoid — and because Del is in love with his mom. Another subplot involves Billy and his high-school sweetheart, Lee, who left "the Valley" but returned to help out with her abusive dad. Daniels and Tierney are at their usual excellent levels, and other solid performances come from Alex Neustaedter as Billy, Julia Mayorga as Lee and Rob Yang as Steve Park, Del's deputy. — Kent Gibbons



ALLBLK's *Covenant* offers up Bible stories with a modern twist.



# Sweltering Orlando Heats Up

Disney's Big Thunder Mountain only hints at the harrowing weather



By Michael Malone  
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Florida news gatherers and residents look at mid-September as the peak of hurricane season. Tropical storms and hurricanes are more than weather stories in Orlando. “Weather is a huge priority,” WOFL-WRBW senior VP and general manager Mike McClain said. “It’s an all-departments effort.”

WOFL has Fox 35 Storm Alert warnings, and ran the special *Tracking the Tropics* in late August. In recent years, Telemundo station WTMO compelled its weather presenters to get their meteorological certification. WKMG offers viewers “Forecasting Change” segments on climate change.

“Weather can be a matter of life and death on a pretty regular basis around the market,” said Jeff Hoffman, WKMG VP and general manager.

Cox Media Group holds market leader WFTV, an ABC affiliate, and independent WRDQ. Hearst Television has NBC affiliate WESH and The CW outlet WKCF. Fox has WOFL and MyNetworkTV affiliate WRBW, known as Fox 35 Plus. Graham Media Group owns CBS station WKMG. NBCUniversal holds WTMO and Univision has WVEN. Spectrum is Orlando’s primary pay TV operator.

Orlando-Daytona Beach-Melbourne moved up a slot to DMA No. 17 this year, bypassing Miami-Fort Lauderdale. New arrivals mean viewers who have not yet settled on their preferred news station.

Orlando is best known for its theme parks, including Walt Disney World and Universal Orlando, but the market offers more. An Orlando Economic Partnership slogan says, “You Don’t



Christy Turner reports for Cox Media Group station WFTV in Orlando.

Know the Half of It.” There’s a vibrant business community and the Space Coast, including Blue Origin and SpaceX. “It feels like there’s a rocket going up every week,” said Paul Briggs, WFTV-WRDQ VP and general manager.

## Lots of Competition

Exceptionally strong owners make the TV market super-competitive. “If you’re a news person at heart, this is the place to be,” Melissa Medalie, VP and news director at WOFL-WRBW, said. “You need to win every minute, every day, and you can’t have a bad day. It pushes us to be better — all of us.”

WFTV won the 6-7 a.m. household race in August and WKMG won viewers 25-54. WFTV won 5 and 6 p.m. in both races, while WESH, which had the Olympics until Aug. 8, took the 11 p.m. title. WESH had a 2.64 in 11 p.m. households, ahead of WKMG’s 2.18, WFTV’s 1.75 and WTMO’s 1.21, with WVEN posting a 1.06 and WOFL a 1.04. In the 11 p.m. demo, WESH scored a 1.31

and WFTV a 0.96. WKMG had a 0.78, WOFL a 0.39 and WTMO a 0.25.

WFTV thrives on balanced reporting, an experienced anchor corps and robust investigative work, such as a late August story on drinking water in Orange County running low, due to a shortage of a purifying element used to treat COVID patients. “Viewers can rely on us to do investigative, to do important journalism,” Briggs said.

Indie WRDQ, known as TV 27, does 7-9 a.m. weekday news, and a 10 p.m. newscast Monday to Sunday.

WESH special *Crusade for Change*, part of Hearst TV’s Project COMMUNITY initiative, focused on social justice. The station has moved some anchors around, including Summer Knowles shifting from 4, 5 and 10 p.m. to 6 and 11 p.m., and Meredith McDonough departing the 6 and 11 p.m. newscasts to do morning news. Michelle Imperato moved from the morning newscast to 5 and 10 p.m.

“We always evaluate where our strengths may be and try to fit the right anchors into the right time periods with the right teams,” said John Soapes, WESH president and general manager. “This gives us the best opportunity to win the time periods and be our best in the market.”

WESH was tied for tops in Olympics Opening Ceremonies ratings among LPM markets, which Soapes said was a result of creative services director Steve Rifkin’s promotional work and the steamy market’s love for summer sports. WESH has the Winter Olympics and Super Bowl in early 2022. “We’ve got some big events here all in a matter of a few months,” said Soapes.

Unlike its competition, WKMG does not have a duopoly partner. The station wasn’t much of a news player when



Hoffman arrived in 2015, but he, news director Allison McGinley and creative director Kym Peoples have hustled to build the News 6 — Getting Results profile. “Now I think we’re established,” said Hoffman. “People know what we stand for.”

WKMG’s ClickOrlando.com has emerged as a digital force in central Florida.

Fox 35 picked up a couple experienced anchors this summer, with Ray Villeda jumping from WNBC New York and John Brown, who used to anchor Fox 35’s Good Day Orlando, departing KTVI St. Louis to anchor WOFL’s evenings. McClain described Brown as “a fan favorite,” and “not the kind of anchor who sits behind the desk and waits for someone to write copy.”

WOFL has syndicated *You Bet Your Life* and *Nick Cannon* premiering this month.

WTMO added noon news during the pandemic and debuted morning traffic and weather updates, running a couple minutes a pop. A morning newscast isn’t in the plans quite yet. “Of course I want to, but the station needs to continue to improve its foundation, its workflows,” president and general manager Migdalia Figueroa said. “We’re still building one step at a time.”

Figueroa was WTVJ Miami VP of news before moving into the WTMO GM office in August 2020.

Stations are connecting with consumers on digital platforms. WTMO plans a daily digital newscast to debut in the fourth quarter. In May,

**WESH news team members (from l.): meteorologist Kellianne Klass, traffic anchor Jaclyn DeAugustino, and news anchors Jason Guy, Meredith McDonough, Sanika Dange and Sheldon Dutes.**

WFTV premiered *Breve Del 9*, a digital daily newsbrief hosted by anchor Nancy Alvarez. Briggs noted “the tremendous Hispanic community” in DMA No. 17.

WOFL is the East Coast hub for streaming platform LiveNOW, serving the Fox Television Stations in the a.m., with Phoenix the hub in the later hours. “We’re really excited to be able to be in this space,” said McClain. “It’s a feather in our cap that the company chose us.”

Orlando turned on ATSC 3.0 this summer.

### Disney Turns 50

Theme parks represent a giant chunk of the local economy. When they’re doing well, the whole market does well. “The pandemic has had an impact on tourism,” Soapes said. “Hopefully we’ll continue to recuperate from that.”

Walt Disney World turns 50 this year. The anniversary festivities begin Oct. 1. “Every day, Disney is in the news,” said Medalie.

The theme parks mean residents almost always have a friend visiting Orlando. “Every person you ever met in your life is going to come through town,” Hoffman said.

The heat this time of year is oppressive, but cooler temps await. Briggs described winters as “spectacularly beautiful.” He added, “Seven months of perfect weather almost makes up for four and a half months” of crippling heat.

Orlando welcomes people from all corners of the globe, whether they’re tourists or new residents,

which tends to make them friendlier to more recent arrivals. “People here are warm and welcoming,” said McClain. “It’s a place where people are from all over, and that’s what I like about it. ●

## ORLANDO STATIONS QUICK TO HELP VIEWERS

THE ORLANDO STATIONS are active participants in local charities. WFTV held two back-to-school initiatives as part of its 9 Family Connection, one asking viewers to donate lightly used laptops and tablets, and another that came up with 3,000 backpacks full of supplies for needy students.



WKMG raised \$700,000 for students needing school supplies with an August 26 phone bank on behalf of A Gift For Teaching. “Every day is a chance for us to build our brand and engage our audience,” said Jeff Hoffman, WKMG VP/general manager.

WOFL’s community initiatives include Fox 35 Back to School Supply Drive and food drive Fox 35 Pay It Forward. Telemundo 31 held multiple COVID phonebanks this summer, providing viewers with vital health information.

As the pandemic took over last year, WESH organized phone banks and virtual food drives. The station raised over \$2 million for Second Harvest in 2020. “We recognized early that the need for food was at an all-time high,” said John Soapes, WESH president and general manager. The money raised, he added, “speaks to the character of this market.” — MM





# Syndication Turns Community Leaders Into Stars

After a year and a half of pandemic, daytime wants to talk about hope



By Paige Albinia  
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While Nick Cannon and Jay Leno are both debuting shows this fall — alongside such stalwarts as Kelly Clarkson and Drew Barrymore — the real stars of syndication in 2021 are regular people doing amazing things in their communities across the country.

Whether it's a new talker, like Nick Cannon, or a veteran program, like Rachael Ray, almost every show is looking to spotlight people who serve their communities. After a year and a half spent slogging through a global pandemic, producers hope to keep audiences enthralled with a balance of inspiration and entertainment, of everyday people and of flashy celebrities.

"One of the things we are looking forward to most is showcasing people doing amazing and incredible things," said Matt Strauss, one of four executive producers on Debmair-Mercury's Nick Cannon, along with Katy Murphy Davis, Michael Goldman and Cannon. "We're looking forward to telling stories about people making a difference in their communities."

"Community is important to Nick and using his fame to make a positive impact is also important to him," Murphy Davis said. "First and foremost, we want the show to be fun, inspirational, entertaining and positive."

Nick Cannon, which will replace Warner Bros.'s *The Real* as a lead-in to Debmair-

Mercury's Wendy Williams on many owned-and-operated Fox affiliates (*The Real* will continue to air on Fox-owned duopoly stations) when it premieres on Monday, Sept. 27, is being produced at the NET Metropolis Studios at 106th and Park in Harlem. Featuring Harlem-based organizations, charities and community leaders as a regular part of the show also is important to Cannon, Strauss said.

The show — which will air live three days a week, with two days taped — will also include a mix of pop culture, celebrity, music and fashion, "all viewed through Nick's unique lens," Murphy Davis said. "In daytime, it is all about people wanting to spend that hour with that person," she continued. "I think it's really important to Nick to have a really authentic connection to his audience. He calls his audience family. He's fun to spend time with and we want people to experience that."

## Betting on Leno

The Fox stations also are introducing another new series this year: *You Bet Your Life*, starring Jay Leno and his *Tonight Show* band leader, Kevin Eubanks. The show will start with three or four minutes of comedy from that duo before the contestants — all of whom have some interesting claim to fame — are introduced. The contestants will then answer trivia questions for the chance to win money.

"We specifically go out and find people who have unique, fun stories," said

**Nick Cannon's new daytime talker will take time to spotlight charities and community leaders near its Harlem studio.**

Stephen Brown, executive VP, programming and development, Fox Television Stations. "The cool thing about the show is that it really fulfills the promise of America — it's two strangers coming together to work together. We're seeing people from completely different sides of the country, in all different colors, shapes and sizes, working together, high-fiving each other, laughing and having a great time. That's what we need right now."

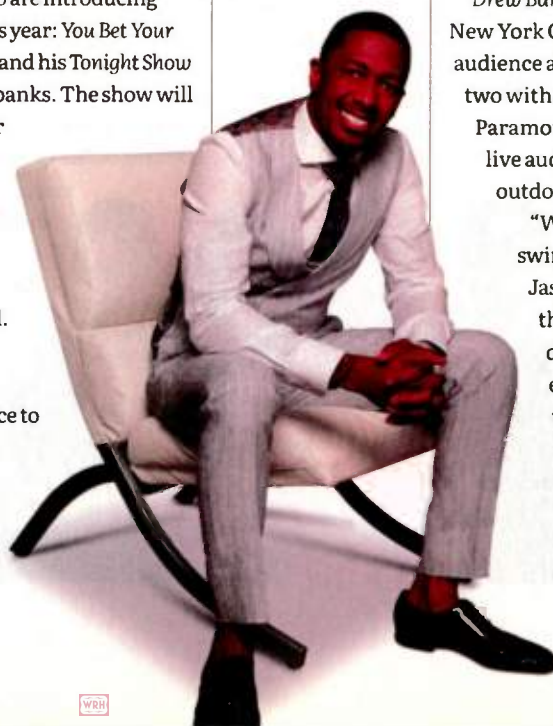
All episodes of *You Bet Your Life*, which is cleared in 98% of the country, are being shot this fall. The show debuts in national syndication on Monday, Sept. 13.

## Getting a Drew-Over

Headed into its season-two premiere on Monday, Sept. 13, CBS Media Ventures' *Drew Barrymore* is looking forward to building connections to its audience, especially since the year-old show hasn't been able to be produced in front of a live audience until now.

*Drew Barrymore*, which was shot in a New York City studio without an audience all last year, will open season two with a week of shows shot from the Paramount lot in Los Angeles, with a live audience joining Barrymore in an outdoor setting.

"We're coming out of the gate swinging," executive producer Jason Kurtz said. "The premiere that we're planning is the one we deserved last year and that we earned this year having been through what we've been through. Instead of one season-two premiere episode, we're building a two-week event under the umbrella of 'there's no place like home.'"





We were talking about how we can celebrate everyone's hometowns and Drew was talking lovingly about her hometown of Los Angeles, so we're taking the show on the road for our first week back.

"We are planning five eventful episodes that feel big and loud and exciting. Within those five episodes, we're celebrating different hometowns with our viewers, whether it's Dallas, Washington, D.C., or Denver. Then we're continuing that when we return home to New York and create five more eventful episodes in our new hometown or New York City."

Drew Barrymore plans to continue with "Drew-Gooder" segments that feature "heart-warming, inspiring human-interest and lifestyle stories," Kurtz said. "Drew does such an excellent job of making people feel comfortable and we want to continue that. We now want to bring the audience in and make them part of the conversation."

Kurtz means that literally. Every time a show is taped, one audience member will be chosen to sit in the "co-host chair," where they will be given a binder about that day's guests, have a camera on them and be given the opportunity to ask their own questions.

"We're looking at that as a way to incorporate the studio audience with the at-home viewers," Kurtz said. "Last year, we would offer the at-home audience a pop quiz and whoever first answered three questions correctly about what had happened on that day's show would win \$1,000. This year, that will be fun to do with studio audience members."

Although the cast and crew of *Drew Barrymore* are excited to finally be shooting in front of a live audience, they also plan to keep some things in place they used during the pandemic — such as technology that allowed a guest to join them from Los Angeles but look like they were on set in New York City.

Other shows plan to keep some things they did during the pandemic in place, even though they don't necessarily have to.

CBS Media Ventures' *Rachael Ray* was forced to shoot shows from Ray's home in Lake Luzerne, New York, in the Adirondacks when the pandemic hit.



***You Bet Your Life* with Jay Leno seeks out contestants with "unique, fun stories," a Fox Television Stations exec said.**

The show moved to her guest house all last season after the main house burned down late last summer.

### **Rachael Ray at Home**

Never daunted, Ray just kept on shooting while her home was rebuilt. She'll provide an update on the house when the show returns for season 16 on Monday, Sept. 13.

"Necessity is the mother of invention," said Janet Annino, an executive producer of *Rachael Ray* since it debuted in 2006. "What we learned doing the show from Rachael's house was that viewers loved it and she actually enjoyed it too. It really opened up a whole new layer with her that the audience connected with. We're building on that this season with a hybrid model in which some shows are shot from her home and some from the studio."

*Rachael Ray* also is redoing the in-studio set to more closely reflect Ray's home to maintain that intimate connection with viewers no matter where the show is shooting from.

"The new set is a little bit scaled down and very cozy," Annino said. "It reflects a lot of the elements that you see in her house — more casual seating on the floor that's closer to Rachael. There will be less of an audience behind a proscenium and more people on love seats and chairs and cushions on the floor."

"When we are in the studio, it is our fond wish and plan to have people there in

person," Annino said. "That might not always be possible so we're still open to having people Zoom in or whatever. When we're [shooting the show] at [Rachael's] home, that is what we'll do."

*Rachael Ray*, which is celebrating its "sweet and savory 16th season," also will focus on community service this year, with such segments as "The Nice List" and "2021-ers" carrying over from last year. In these segments, the show found people who were doing "incredible things in their communities and making a difference one thing at a time. That's something we are going to continue — highlighting people who are bringing food to food deserts, packing backpacks for kids in need and so forth. That's become one of the hallmark staples of this show. For Rachael right now, it's really about showing that one person can make a difference."

Finally, Wrigley Media's new court show, *Relative Justice*, which is cleared in more than 82% of the country and premieres Monday, Sept. 13, sees Judge Rhonda Mills solve the problems of average people who are in conflict with someone in their family — whether it's their parents, siblings or cousins.

"The feelings people express on this show are so genuine, the viewers will be so drawn in with the families and feeling compassion for them," said Misdee Wrigley, CEO of Wrigley Media, which is based in Lexington, Kentucky. "Several viewers will say 'I've been in that situation, and that's happened to me.' We've been surprised by how open people are once they get in front of Rhonda and start to talk about their lives."

While the pandemic is not over, producers are relieved to be getting back to some semblance of normal.

"Last year, the challenges upon us were ever-changing," *Drew Barrymore*'s Kurtz said. "Our motto became 'turn every obstacle into an opportunity.' It was hard to plan when you were constantly being challenged with new parameters. That still exists to an extent but now nothing is even giving us pause this year — we're able to pivot quicker, even while we're ever mindful of what's happening out there." ●



# D.C. Salutes NAB's Honest Broker

Gordon Smith leaves a legacy of trust and respect, shown and earned



By John Eggerton  
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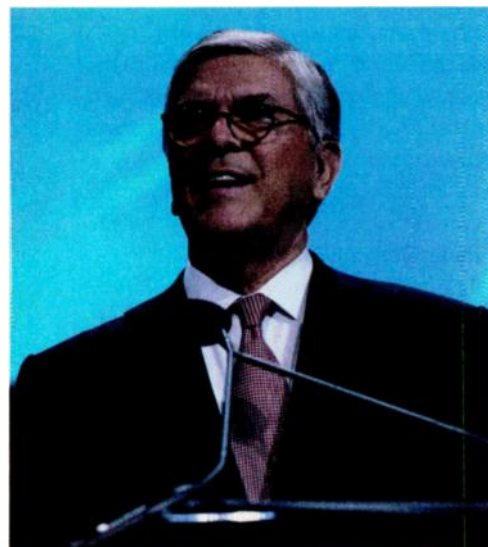
**G**ordon Smith will preside over his last NAB Show as president and CEO of the National Association of Broadcasters next month.

Smith took over in November 2009, following the long and storied tenure of Eddie Fritts atop the association, a hard act to follow as demonstrated by the short and rather rocky tenure of ex-beer association executive David Rehr that preceded Smith's arrival. Back

in April 2021, NAB said the departing Smith would be succeeded in January by Curtis LeGeyt, currently the association's chief operating officer. Smith will transition to an advisory and advocacy role through Dec. 31, 2024.

A former U.S. Senator from Oregon, Smith has guided his members through a number of sea changes on the way to its interactive, next-gen future, always with his eye on the North Star of the industry's public-interest calling.

We reached out to some major Washington players for their thoughts on his tenure and what emerged was a strikingly consistent portrait of a



**NAB president and CEO Gordon Smith speaks at the last in-person NAB Show in 2019. Smith will step down from that role at the end of the year.**

fundamentally good man and an executive who has exhibited grace under pressure and commanded respect, while garnering affection from allies and the loyal opposition alike.

## Jessica Rosenworcel, Acting FCC chairwoman:

Senator Smith took the reins at NAB right after broadcast television stations transitioned to digital service. After ushering these stations into a new age, he faced another big challenge as the same stations were given the option to participate in the first ever broadcast incentive auction. That's a lot of change to manage!

He did it all gracefully and along the way he was also a zealous advocate for radio and a consistently smart and respectful presence in every policy discussion about the power and potential of broadcasting. I wish him the best in retirement.



## Gary Shapiro, president and CEO, Consumer Technology Association:

Senator Smith is a strong and steady leader, who has ensured

broadcasters made their voices heard on major policy issues. On a personal level, I have enormous respect and appreciation for Senator Smith. He is trustworthy, intelligent and has a dignity that sets him apart as a stellar individual.



## Preston Padden, Former top News Corp. and Disney executive, currently an independent consultant:

Gordon Smith may be the nicest person in Washington, D.C. Coupled with a keen grasp of the issues, that niceness has reaped huge rewards for broadcasters.



## Chip Pickering, INCOMPAS CEO and former Mississippi congressman:

An industry of communicators has been blessed to have Gordon Smith serve as their voice for the past decade. He is a tremendous leader, whose wisdom and decency has helped unite many of us around common goals for the greater good.

It was a true honor to serve with Gordon in Congress, and then to be at the table with him as our industry continues to evolve toward a brighter, better future. Family is and always will be Gordon's true north, and I am excited for them as a new journey begins.





**Richard Wiley, chairman emeritus, Wiley Rein LLP, and former FCC chair:** Gordon

Smith has been a forceful, determined and effective advocate for the broadcast industry. But, at the same time, he is a thoroughly considerate individual admired by allies and opponents alike. And, yes, I would buy frozen foods and maybe even a used car from him. [Smith Frozen Foods is the family business].



**Matthew M. Polka, president and CEO, ACA**

**Connects:** NAB president Gordon Smith has served with distinction in public service and government relations since 1992. Whether in the Oregon State Senate, the U.S. Senate or in his post leading the NAB, Senator Smith navigated the tricky waters of politics with character, dignity and an always-friendly demeanor. In his work at NAB, he led networks, television groups and radio stations — not always the most sanguine of groups — with skill and

savvy during dramatic change in the market, especially in the competitive tussle for advertising support.

Everyone I know who dealt with Senator Smith knew him to be not only a worthy adversary, but also a leader who always made a sincere attempt to appreciate the other side's point of view. The Washington, D.C., public policy scene will miss Senator Smith and his uncommon approach to advocacy in action. I wish Senator Smith the very best, with God's many blessings.



**Robert McDowell, co-chair, global communications practice, Cooley LLP, and former FCC commissioner:**

Gordon has led NAB with grace, wit, determination and resilience. His steady hand on the association's tiller has navigated it through the treacherous waters of increasing and intense competition from powerful tech companies for eyeballs, ears and ad dollars; increasing and asymmetric regulation of broadcasters when compared to other media, especially during the Obama years; and enduring a pandemic that dealt a blow to

NAB's revenue, among many other challenges.

Throughout it all, Gordon was a calm and courageous voice of reason who was a delight to work with while I was a commissioner. His legacy will cast a long shadow for years to come.

**Sen. Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.), chair, Senate Commerce Committee:**

I have had the pleasure of working with Senator Gordon Smith for decades, first as a colleague in the Senate and then in his role as the head of the National Association of Broadcasters.

He has always been a tireless advocate for those he represents, from the people of Oregon to radio and television broadcasters throughout the country. The country will be better for the work Gordon has done to secure a bright future for local broadcasting even as consumer video habits have changed.

And Gordon knew better than most how important it is for broadcasters to remain committed to the cities and towns where they are located while serving the larger national interest. I wish Gordon all the best in his retirement.



**Steven K. Berry, president and CEO, Competitive Carriers Association:**

I've had the pleasure of knowing and

working with Gordon Smith for many years, and I consider him a friend. Gordon has been a highly effective advocate for NAB, bringing stability and a healthy understanding and knowledge of Congress to the organization.

He is a respected industry leader, an honest broker of solutions, and on a personal level, someone I'd be glad to meet out on the golf course any day of the week. Congratulations Gordon on your accomplishments; I wish you well in your future endeavors!

**Michael Powell, president and CEO, NCTA-The Internet & Television Association, and former FCC chair:**

I have had the pleasure of knowing and working with Gordon Smith for years, both while he was a U.S. senator and then as he led the National Association of Broadcasters for more than a decade.

Gordon is a truly honorable public servant and friend whose calm demeanor and thoughtful leadership helped steer NAB during a period of significant change and upheaval in the traditional media marketplace. We wish him all the best in his future endeavors and his well-deserved retirement.





# Shrinking Media Industry Scrambles for Tech Talent

Employee turnover is higher than usual, PwC survey finds



By Jon Lafayette  
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The television industry's pivot to streaming is contributing to a new talent-management headache for senior media company executives.

In addition to having to wrangle the legendary egos of actors and the high-profile producers and directors who make the hits that make the cash register ring, technology talent are the industry's new stars, according to a report from PwC.

Traditional media companies have been downsizing and consolidating at breakneck speed as cord-cutting and COVID cut into traditional revenue streams. Outplacement firm Challenger, Gray & Christmas said the media industry shed 30,711 jobs in 2020, up from 10,201 jobs the year before.

At the same time, there is still strong demand for certain skilled positions — some of them new to the telecom, media and technology (TMT) sector — and retaining those people is a top concern, according to PwC.

"Competition for TMT talent is as fierce as ever, with more than 90% of TMT leaders reporting higher-than-usual turnover," the PwC report said.

## Boom for Tech Workers

"More than other sectors, however, TMT workers are benefiting from the pandemic-related tech boom," the report continued. "They're switching jobs for higher salaries (48% of TMT executives versus 41% in all industries), top-notch benefits (30% versus 23%), upgraded career advancement opportunities (42% versus

33%) and improved relationships with managers (35% versus 20%). To compete for talent, TMT leaders are shoring up career-development opportunities (47% versus 34% overall) and offering flexible schedules (49% versus 43%)."

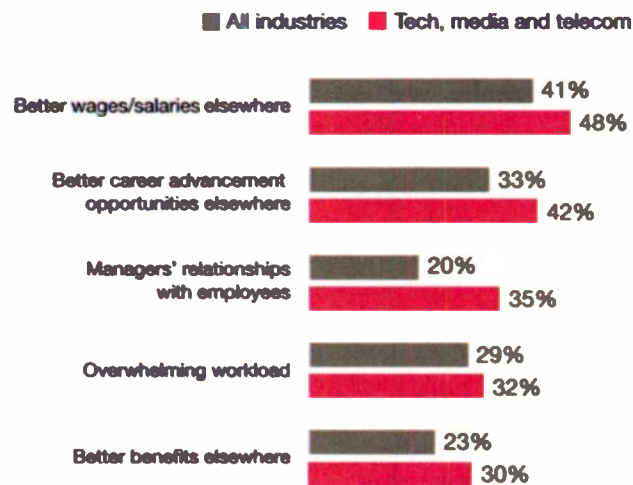
Mark Boraio, Technology, Media and Telecommunications partner at PwC U.S., told B+C/Multichannel News that the media companies accelerated the hiring of technologists in order to launch streaming platforms. But they continue to seek tech expertise in order to increase the efficiency of both their new and legacy businesses.

Boraio, who had helped media companies launch streaming businesses, noted that many legacy media companies "hollowed out" their traditional broad-



PwC partner  
Mark Boraio

## TOP 5 TMT EXECs THINK THEIR PEOPLE ARE LEAVING



NOTE: Highest ranked choices from a list of 16 options.

Q: Data shows that turnover has increased in many industries. Why do you think more employees are leaving your company right now?

SOURCE: PwC US Pulse Survey, Aug. 19, 2021. Base of 661 business executives who report higher-than-normal turnover at their companies, TMT executive base of 79.

cast and cable businesses, putting their assets into their streaming business.

"There's a narrative of media companies grabbing tech folks to launch these platforms, or to enhance an existing platform that needed work," Boraio said. "That was definitely a 2019, 2020 narrative.

"Now, what you're seeing is now that they've launched these platforms, they're looking at other processes they can put in the cloud and do more efficiently," Boraio said.

After years of mergers, some media companies have hundreds of analog systems handling content. That industry consolidation will continue, he said.

## Seeking Heads in the Cloud

The people media companies are looking for now are digital natives who think cloud-first, he said, calling them business technologists.

"They're people who understand this digital thinking and can lay out the processes, lay out the organization and a model that is exponentially more efficient than the analog modes," he said. "The cloud has changed the game for them."

Media companies used to have to poach that talent from technology firms. Now, they are hiring away from other media companies, offering higher pay and better titles.

"I have a handful of clients that I personally work with who all in the past 90 days have moved from one media company to another because their skill set is in high demand," the PwC exec said. "All of them got either title increases or significant pay increases. They're effectively cashing in on those skill sets and those accomplishments."

Boraio said these weren't top-level executives. "I'm talking about director-level people, senior managers. It's one thing to have a vision. It's quite another to be able to execute on that. What I'm seeing is a good thing. We're seeing high demand for those operators."

The ability to use technology to legacy processes and the ability to be forward-looking about new business models will continue to be valuable, he said. ●



# BETTER *Together*

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# Dish Wireless: Strong Stomachs Required

Analysts caution that despite AT&T deal, satellite TV provider's wireless ambitions are still risky



By Mike Farrell  
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With the launch of its first wireless market — Las Vegas — fast approaching, Dish Network has made some big moves, including its recent mobile virtual network operator agreement with AT&T Wireless.

Analysts, though, are still skeptical as to how the satellite-TV provider will be able to carve out a big enough niche as the fourth player in an already crowded market.

Dish plans to launch its wireless service in Las Vegas in the fourth quarter (later than the Q3 launch originally planned) but has been preparing for this day for nearly a decade. Dish purchased its first swath of wireless spectrum, from bankrupt DBSD North America and TerreStar, for a combined \$2.8 billion in 2012 and has been accumulating spectrum and striking deals ever since to lay the groundwork for what it says will be a state-of-the-art 5G offering. At a cost of about \$10 billion — a figure some analysts believe is painfully low — Dish has said it expects its wireless offering to be the “5G Network of the Future.” But even as the launch date approaches, the company has been reluctant to offer too many details.

During its Q2 conference call with analysts, Dish executive VP of network development Dave Mayo, who is responsible for the wireless buildout, said that construction has begun on about 30 geographies within 36 markets in which Dish will initially offer service. The company expects to have finished construction activities in Las Vegas, the first wireless

market, by the end of the third quarter, and will begin beta testing customers in Q4.

Dish is under the gun to meet several federal mandates around its wireless spectrum, and needs its network to reach 20% of the population by next June, a deadline Mayo said it is on schedule to meet. But there are other deadlines ahead.

## Prepaid Biz Has Problems

Barclays media analyst Kannan Venkateshwar said in a research note that Dish “investors will need a strong stomach.” Because while Dish is gearing up for a big splash in Sin City, it continues to shed prepaid wireless subscribers (acquired through deals with T-Mobile) at an alarming rate and other recent deals don’t appear to alleviate its biggest pressures, namely federal buildout deadlines and the shutdown of T-Mobile’s 3G network in January.

Dish acquired about 9 million prepaid Boost wireless customers from T-Mobile last year, but Venkateshwar wrote that Dish has lost more than 10% of that base in the past four quarters, a slide that is expected to continue. And while its recent 10-year MVNO deal with AT&T answers the question of what Dish will do once its similar arrangement with T-Mobile expires in 2026, that won’t help Dish meet its 2023 buildout commitments.

“Therefore, there doesn’t appear to be any change in Dish’s capex or opex trajectory on wireless,” Venkateshwar wrote.

And it is going to take plenty of capital to get where it wants to go.

According to Moffett, Dish’s Q2 5G network deployment capex was \$200.5 million, about 4 times what it spent in

**Dish Network chairman Charlie Ergen said T-Mobile’s plan to shutter its 3G network was the company acting like a “sore winner.”**

the prior quarter, but that’s “just a warm-up” to what will be needed to meet FCC buildout requirements. The analyst estimated that Dish needs to spend another \$1.2 billion in 2021 alone and another \$1.5 billion between 2022 and 2025. While the AT&T MVNO agreement eases some of the pressure on Dish — Moffett wrote that it can now focus strictly on meeting its FCC deadlines instead of worrying about what comes after — there is still substantial spending to be done. According to Moffett’s report, Dish has commitments to spend about \$6.6 billion after 2005, bringing the total to \$8.8 billion on minimum payments for tower leases, network deployment and other obligations. Moffett said the figure is particularly close to the \$10 billion Dish said it would spend in total on building out its wireless offering, “and they have barely started spending on the network yet.”

As far as the prepaid Boost business, most analysts expected that segment to decline over time, as customers migrated to the postpaid offering. But the decline is happening faster than expected. By 2025, Moffett expects the prepaid business to lose nearly 2 million customers, dipping from 8.4 million in 2021 to 6.7 million in 2025. Postpaid customers, which include customers acquired through the AT&T MVNO agreement and Dish’s own phone network, should grow from an estimated 99,000 in 2021 to 2.8 million in 2025, the analyst predicted.

“There was a time when most observers imagined Boost to be a bridge from an MVNO to an MNO business; Dish would build the base of subscribers as a reseller and then transition those subscribers to Dish’s own network, using the prepaid MVNO as both a source of cash but also, more importantly, as a source of subscribers with which to load the network,” Moffett wrote. “It isn’t working out that way.”

## T-Mobile Shutdown Looms

Dish also has to solve another problem: T-Mobile’s plan to shut down its 3G CDMA wireless network in January. Most of Dish’s prepaid customers receive service over that network, and Dish faces substantial costs to transition





those customers, including new handsets, if it can't find a replacement. The AT&T deal won't solve that particular issue because AT&T doesn't have a CDMA network.

Dish has complained to the DOJ about T-Mobile's plans to shutter the network and the agency said in July that any shutdown would be "unreasonable," giving some hope that the 3G network will stay live. Dish still has to prepare for the worst.

"Even the possibility of a 3G shutdown by T-Mobile suggests a challenging second half," Moffett wrote.

On the Q2 conference call, Dish chairman Charlie Ergen said T-Mobile, which received what he said was billions of dollars in synergies from its Sprint purchase last year, is acting like a "sore winner."

"You've all met that guy in grade school who wants to brag about himself and brag [about] how good he was and spike the ball in front of you," he said. "Sometimes it takes a bit of maturity to be a good winner, and they're kind of — they're a sore winner."

The T-Mobile 3G situation notwithstanding, Dish also will have to deal with some macro issues as it enters the deployment stage of its wireless business. In an Aug. 24 report, Moffett noted that wireless subscriber growth, off the charts in the past 12 months, was 5 times the U.S. annual population growth rate in Q2, fueled by promotional offerings that gave new customers free equipment if they added an additional line, whether they needed it or not. Those aggressive promotions have led to big gains for all players: AT&T had its fastest subscriber additions in years, Verizon swung from customer losses to gains, T-Mobile beat and raised its guidance and cable operators have taken 30% of net additions, seemingly without affecting the competition. But Moffett wondered: what will happen when that growth fades?

Cable has made huge strides in attracting wireless customers. Comcast, Charter and Altice USA accounted for about 6.5 million lines in Q2, up from nearly 6 million in Q1 — and a big leap from just a few years ago, when the three launched wireless mainly as a broadband retention tool.

Cable's lower prices — Comcast and

Charter initially charged about \$45 per month for unlimited service, compared to the \$60 or more the incumbents charged — and more flexible service plans resonated with customers.

Incumbents like AT&T and T-Mobile took notice, but as they dropped their prices to gain share, Comcast followed suit, reducing unlimited Xfinity Wireless service to \$30 per month, per line (for four or more lines) in May, not including taxes and fees. As the bigger players have sweetened the promotional pot with free handset deals and streaming video products like HBO Max and Netflix (a practice cable has so far avoided), the gap continues to shrink.

Now Moffett says offerings like T-Mobile's mid-tier Magenta service, which

includes three lines (the fourth line is free), a free Netflix basic standard-definition subscription and all taxes and fees for \$40 per line per month, is much more competitive. AT&T's unlimited wireless service is priced at \$50 per month for four lines, but includes HBO Max (a \$14.95 monthly value) and 4K streaming.

T-Mobile also is aggressively discounting on the prepaid side of the business, with promotions for Metro 5G prepaid service that include a free Samsung Galaxy A32 handset and unlimited 5G service for \$25 per month, said to be half what Boost and AT&T's Cricket prepaid service charge.

### Addicted to Promos

Verizon said in July that it would stop the more aggressive discounting, but has indicated it will be as promotional as needed to maintain parity, according to Moffett. The big question is whether AT&T and T-Mobile will turn off the promotional spigot and risk losing price-conscious customers, or keep them going and suffer the likely financial pain.

Moffett believes the latter scenario will prevail. "Cheap lines and free phones inevitably promote low-quality phone net additions," Moffett wrote. "To keep those lines from churning, or to replace them when they do, the companies now dependent on promotions to bolster growth will need them even more to maintain it."

Dish has already seen some of that happening already. In Q2, it lost about 201,000 prepaid Boost wireless phone customers, rising to 400,000 if its Q2 purchase of Republic Wireless is taken out of the mix, despite 2.3% growth for other providers in the prepaid wireless sector.

For its part, Dish hasn't yet fully shown its hand regarding wireless. Moffett wrote after the Q2 earnings call there is still some uncertainty whether the service will be wholesale or retail, national or regional or a combination of all four. One thing is certain: Incumbents and cable operators will continue, at least for the short term, their ultra-aggressive approach to the business.

The big question is whether Dish Wireless can keep up. ●

## UNDER THE GUN

*Dish Network continues to face a series of federal deadlines to build out its various blocks of wireless spectrum over the next few years.*

### Dish Network Wireless Buildout Deadlines

JUNE 2022	20% coverage (700 MHz, H-Block, AWS-4)
JUNE 2023	50% coverage (700 MHz, H-Block AWS-4) 70% coverage (600 MHz)
JUNE 2025	70% coverage (700 MHz, H-Block, AWS-4) 75% coverage (600 MHz)
DECEMBER 2026	End of T-Mobile roaming deal

SOURCE: Company reports, MoffettNathanson estimates and analysis

## BOOST OR NO BOOST

*MoffettNathanson estimates that Dish Network will continue to lose prepaid Boost wireless customers over the next few years at a pretty steady clip, while postpaid customers will grow as its network deployment spreads.*

### Dish Wireless Total Subscribers (in thousands)

	2021E	2022E	2023E	2024E	2025E
PREPAID	8,353	7,841	7,428	7,075	6,761
POSTPAID	99	646	1,323	2,059	2,863

SOURCE: Company reports, MoffettNathanson estimates and analysis



# People

## Notable executives on the move



### BET

BET has elevated **Keith Lawson** to senior VP of brand solutions. He will lead brand solutions efforts, as well as the network's advertising sales production teams to support ideation efforts and project management.



### BET

**Tavia Pitts** was elevated to senior VP of ad sales at BET. She will continue to manage some of the ViacomCBS-owned programmer's key clients while handling advertising sales responsibilities for the BET Her and BET Live platforms.



### CHARTER

**Jodi Robinson** was promoted to executive VP, digital platforms at Charter Communications. She joined Charter as a senior VP in 2014, overseeing the user experience design and development and digital platforms organizations.



### CHARTER

Charter Communications upped **Jake Perlman** to executive VP, software development & IT. He joined Charter as senior VP of video and shared software services in 2016, adding video engineering, voice engineering, lab infrastructure and deployment support in 2019.



### CROWN MEDIA

**Megan Barbe** has joined Hallmark Channel parent Crown Media Family Networks as VP, consumer insights, based in Los Angeles. She comes from Freeform, where she had worked as the network's VP, research and consumer insights.



### CROWN MEDIA

Crown Media Family Networks has hired **Courtney Huber** as VP, distribution partnership marketing, based in New York. She comes from factual over-the-top service CuriosityStream, where she was VP, international partner marketing.



### DISCOVERY

Discovery has elevated **Jason Sarlanis** to president, crime and investigative content, linear and streaming, assuming the leadership of ID: Investigation Discovery from the retiring Henry Schleiff. He had been senior VP, development, at TLC.



### EWTN

Catholic-focused network EWTN has named **Shannon Mullen** as editor-in-chief of the Catholic News Agency. A 33-year journalist, he served as an investigative reporter, enterprise editor and premium content coach over 10 years with Gannett.



### KARE

Tegna-owned NBC affiliate KARE Minneapolis-St. Paul has named **Reggie Wilson** as its sports director, appearing on 6 p.m. and 10 p.m. newscasts. He comes from WCPO Cincinnati, where he hosted the sports talk show *Sports of All Sorts*.



### MSG NETWORKS

MSG Networks in New York has hired **Talaya Wilkins** as VP of content strategy. The former ESPN producer will focus on developing programming targeted at the expanding sports betting audience and lead the growing MSG Networks content team.





**NEWSY**

E.W. Scripps has hired **Eric Ludgood** as head of multiplatform news network Newsy, based in Atlanta. Most recently the assistant news director at Fox-owned station WAGA Atlanta, he spent 13 years at CNN International, including as VP for editorial.



**WEIGEL**

**Donna D'Alessandro** has joined Weigel Broadcasting as executive VP, head of content, involved in programming its suite of digital broadcast networks. She comes from Discovery, where she was VP, factual programming for Discovery Channel, Animal Planet and Science Channel.



**NEXSTAR**

**Lee Ann Gliha** has joined Nexstar Broadcast Group as executive VP and chief financial officer. She comes from investment bank Jeffries LLC, where she was managing director overseeing more than \$90 billion in tech, media and telecommunications transactions.



**WHAS**

Tegna has named **Lisa Columbia** as president and general manager of ABC affiliate WHAS, Louisville, Kentucky. She rejoins the station from ABC affiliate WTVQ Lexington, Kentucky, where she was general and local sales manager.



**SAMBA TV**

**Kris Magel** has joined omniscreeen advertising and analytics provider Samba TV as VP and head of agency development. He comes from advertising agency Dentsu, where he was president of media clients, responsible for building cross-media solutions.



**WILKINSON BAKER KNAUER**

**KC Becker** has joined Wilkinson Barker Knauer in Denver as a partner specializing in communications, energy and environment. A former Colorado state representative, she is the first woman to serve as Colorado's Speaker of the House.



**TVU NETWORKS**

**Douglas Russell** has joined cloud and IP-based video solutions provider TVU Networks as Northwest Regional Accounts Manager, North America Sales. He has held senior-level engineering posts at Amazon Prime Sports, Keycode Media and Raytheon.



**WTKR**

**Adam Chase** was named VP and general manager of WTKR, the E.W. Scripps-owned CBS affiliate in Norfolk, Virginia. He had been VP and general manager of Scripps-owned ABC station KXXV in Waco, Texas, and independent station KRHD in Bryan, Texas.

**BRIEFLY NOTED**

*Other industry execs making moves*

Byron Allen's Allen Media Group has hired **Jocelyn Langevine** as VP of advertising sales and client partnerships for theGrio. Langevine most recently was senior director of integrated marketing at ViacomCBS.

... Crown Media Family Networks elevated **Marc Lindenman** to senior director, distribution. He had worked in the partner marketing unit. ... Advertising tech firm Targetspot has named **Laurence Henuzet** as operations director. ...

**Jennifer Lyons** has joined CBS-owned WBBM Chicago as president and general manager. The longtime news director at WGN Chicago was most recently VP of news at Nexstar Broadcast Group-owned cable network NewsNation. ... **Bob Ellis** was named VP and general manager of Graham Media Group-owned WDIV Detroit. He was VP and GM of WJXT Jacksonville, Florida, with responsibility for WCWJ.

Show Name Italics: Company/Studio Regular; Show Name Italics: Company/Studio Regular





At the Aug. 10 drive-in premiere screening event for Disney Channel's *Spin* at Santa Monica Airport (l. to r.): stars **Arantika**, **Jahriil Cook**, **Kemi Medders** and **Aryan Simhadri**.



Starz president and CEO **Jeffrey Hirsch** speaks onstage at the Aug. 11 premiere event for original series *Heels*.



At the Los Angeles premiere of FX's *Reservation Dogs* (l. to r.): co-creator/writer/director **Sterlin Harjo**; cast members **Devery Jacobs**, **D'Pharaoh Woon-A-Tai**, **Lane Factor** and **Paulina Alexis**; and co-creator/EP/writer **Taika Waititi**.



At the Aug. 11 Los Angeles red carpet and premiere event for Starz's *Heels* (l. to r.): **Michael Waldron**, **Alexander Ludwig**, **Mike O'Malley** and **Stephen Amell**.



Cast members **Lil Mike** (l.) and **Fungybone** at NeueHouse in Los Angeles for the Aug. 5 premiere of FX's *Reservation Dogs*.

Disney/Richard Harbaugh; Michael Kovac/Getty Images for Starz (2); Frank Micelotta/FX/PictureGroup (2)





Marcus Scribner of ABC's *Black-ish* took part in the network's Aug. 18 "On The House-Ish" promotion, which offered free parking to shoppers at The Grove in Los Angeles.



At the Aug. 2 special reception for Amazon Studios' *Modern Love* in New York (l. to r.): cast members **Bubba Weiler**, **Hillary Fisher**, **Zuzanna Szadkowski**, **Andrew Rannells**, **Marquis Rodriguez** and **Zane Pais**.



Judge **Heidi Klum** arrives for the quarterfinals of NBC's *America's Got Talent* Aug. 17 at the Dolby Theater in Los Angeles.



(From l.): **Sarah Aubrey**, head of original content, HBO Max; **Issa Rae**, executive producer; **Jen O'Connell**, EVP, original programming, HBO Max; and **Nichole Roberts**, VP of development, Love USA, at HBO Max's Aug. 18 *Sweet Life: Los Angeles* screening at NeueHouse in Los Angeles.



At HBO Max's *Sweet Life: Los Angeles* screening (l. to r.): Actress **Tatyana Ali**, **Jamal Ali** and **Katherine Cooke**.

ABC, FilmMagic; Getty Images for Amazon Studios; FilmMagic for WarnerMedia



# GIGABIT-SPEED U.S. BROADBAND SUBS MORE THAN DOUBLED IN Q2

NEXT TV

**AROUND 10.5% OF** U.S. broadband subscribers take a service with a download speed of 1 Gigabit per second or higher, according to new figures released by ISP software-as-a-service provider OpenVault.

The Q2 figures represent more than a doubling of the 4.8% market share reported in the second quarter of 2020.

At the same time, homes with broadband speeds of less than 100 Megabits per second declined significantly, representing nearly 40% in the second quarter of 2020 but just 20.1% in Q2 of this year.

According to Hoboken, New Jersey-based OpenVault, average broadband use was up more than 14% year over year to 433.5 Gigabytes of data, but down 6% sequentially from the first quarter.

Notably, the firm said the overall trend towards higher speeds is encouraging power usage. The percentage of subscribers who used 500 GB or more a month increased by 2.7% in the second quarter to nearly 32% of the market.

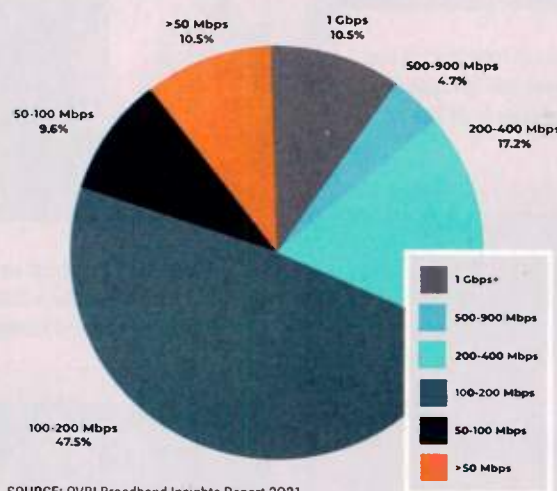
The percentage of the market chewing up

1 Terabyte or more, meanwhile, shot up to 10.8%.

— Daniel Frankel

For more stories like this, go to [nexttv.com](http://nexttv.com).

## PROVISIONED BROADBAND SPEEDS



SOURCE: OVBI Broadband Insights Report 2Q21

## B+C'S MOST VIEWED

Top stories on [broadcastingcable.com](http://broadcastingcable.com), Aug. 11-Sept. 3

1. Anthony Mason To Depart 'CBS This Morning'
2. 'Jeopardy!' EP Mike Richards Put Himself in Pole Position to Become the Show's Permanent Host (Analysis)
3. Nate Burleson Joins 'CBS This Morning'
4. John Ritter To Be Profiled in ABC Special 'Superstar'
5. Former Hallmark Head Bill Abbott Renames Cable Networks To Create Family Friendly GAC Brands

To read these stories, visit [broadcastingcable.com](http://broadcastingcable.com).

## STICKIEST SHOWS Top 10 cable programs ranked by viewer engagement\*

Stickiness Rank	Ratings Rank	Telecast (Week Ending Aug. 22)	Network	Stickiness Index*
1	42	Aurora Teagarden Mysteries: Honeymoon, Honeymurder	Hallmark Movies	172
2	425	90 Day Fiancé: Happily Ever After?	TLC	157
3	93	The Walking Dead	AMC	146
4	39	A Little Daytime Drama	Hallmark	144
5	94	Tyler Perry's Sistas	BET	138
6	109	Tyler Perry's The Oval	BET	136
7	49	WWE Monday Night Raw	USA	136
8	155	The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills	Bravo	131
9	1	Hannity	Fox News	131
10	210	Love & Hip Hop Atlanta	VH1	130



The Stickiness Index looks at viewer engagement based on several factors. A higher number indicates more of the audience is tuned in for the duration of the telecast. \* TV Engagement ratings powered by Comscore's TV Essentials. (Sorted by social media activity)

Aurora Teagarden Mysteries: Honeymoon, Honeymurder, Hallmark Movies



# STICKIEST SHOWS Top 10 broadcast programs ranked by viewer engagement\*



Stickiness Rank	Ratings Rank	Telecast (Week Ending Aug. 22)	Network	Stickiness Index*
1	83	<i>La Hija Del Embajador</i>	Univision	146
2	80	<i>Si Nos Dejan</i>	Univision	145
3	114	<i>Hercai, Amor Y Venganza</i>	Telemundo	143
4	103	<i>Exatlón Estados Unidos</i>	Telemundo	141
5	157	<i>Enamorándonos</i>	UniMás	139
6	92	<i>Diseñando Tu Amor</i>	Univision	137
7	2	<i>America's Got Talent</i>	NBC	134
8	124	<i>Café Con Aroma De Mujer</i>	Telemundo	131
9	107	<i>¿Quién Es La Máscara?</i>	Univision	131
10	156	<i>The Marine 3: Homefront</i>	UniMás	125

**comscore** The Stickiness Index looks at viewer engagement based on several factors. A higher number indicates more of the audience is tuned in for the duration of the telecast. \* TV Engagement ratings powered by Comscore's TV Essentials. (Sorted by social media activity.)

## THE BINGE REPORT

THE WEEK OF AUG. 23

TV Time users track the shows they're watching on TV via the TV Time app. That data is then used to determine the most-binged shows of the week in the U.S.



1	<i>Brooklyn Nine-Nine</i>	NBC	Share of binges: 2.15%
2	<i>Manifest</i>	NBC	Share of binges: 1.36%
3	<i>Outer Banks</i>	Netflix	Share of binges: 1.23%
4	<i>Grace and Frankie</i>	Netflix	Share of binges: 1.07%
5	<i>Ted Lasso</i>	Apple TV Plus	Share of binges: 1.05%
6	<i>Big Brother</i>	CBS	Share of binges: 0.99%
7	<i>Titans</i>	HBO Max	Share of binges: 0.97%
8	<i>The Chair</i>	Netflix	Share of binges: 0.93%
9	<i>Grey's Anatomy</i>	ABC	Share of binges: 0.89%
10	<i>Clickbait</i>	Netflix	Share of binges: 0.88%

Networks reflected don't include every viewing platform available, nor total viewing in share of binge.



To receive "The Binge Report" and other TV Time reports, visit [www.whipmedia.com/subscribe/](http://www.whipmedia.com/subscribe/)



## MCN'S MOST VIEWED

Top five stories on [multichannel.com](http://multichannel.com), Aug. 11-Sept. 3

1. DirecTV and Dish In Terminal Orbit? Their Satellites Are About to Age Out
2. Former Hallmark Head Bill Abbott Renames Cable Networks To Create Family Friendly GAC Brands
3. Cable Ops to FCC: Rethink ATSC 3.0 Retrans Regime
4. Roku and Charter End 9-Month Spectrum TV Blackout
5. 'Heartland' Season 14 on UPtv July 8

To read these stories, go to [multichannel.com](http://multichannel.com).

The Marine 3: Homefront: Univision; Brooklyn Nine-Nine: NBC



# VIZIO Most-Watched Shows on TV in August



Of all the live, linear minutes watched by VIZIO smart TVs in August, 3.58% of the time was spent watching the Tokyo Olympics. See which other shows captured the most watch time in the graphic below.



Via Vizio's Inscope, the TV data company with insights from a panel of 17 million active and opted-in smart TVs. Data is linear, live TV only and includes all episode types (new and reruns). Rankings are by percent share duration, defined as 'of all the live, linear minutes watched in August, X% of the time was spent on show Y'



## People Active Online\* at Home During the Work Day

1/29/2020-8/27/2021 | Data from 14 Metro Areas. Updated Weekly

People active online\* during the work day before COVID-19  
 People active online\* during the work day now

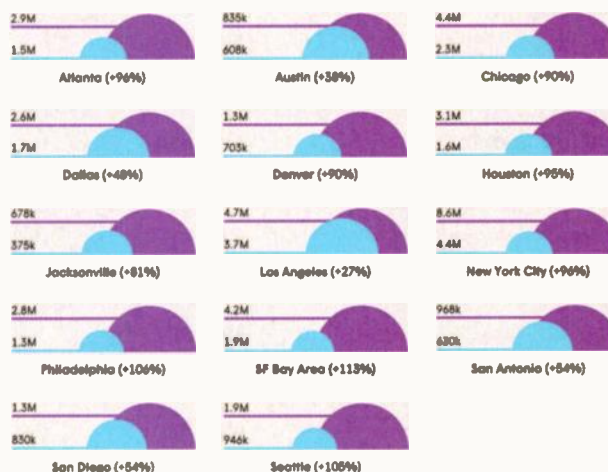
### NATIONAL AVERAGE IN THE UNITED STATES



**22.6 Million**  
were active online\* during the work day before COVID-19

**40.2 Million**  
are active online\* during the work day now

### CITY BY CITY BREAKDOWN



\*Estimates based on metro area populations and anonymized data taken from a sample of U.S. households powered by the Plume Cloud. Active online defined as 6+ hours between 9a-6p.



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Media Networks

TV **ONE**  
REPRESENT





By Janice Silver, The Cable Center  
@TheCableCenter

# Riding the Wave of Change

## Why developing a culture of innovation and agility is essential to success

**T**he pandemic has changed everything — the way we socialize, celebrate, communicate and how we work.

In the content and connectivity industry, the challenge was twofold: to quickly equip a remote workforce and ensure that people worldwide stayed connected. Proudly, the industry rose to the challenge, exhibiting agility and innovation in a time of crisis. But now that seas are starting to calm, what will organizations continue to do to ride the wave of change?

I talked to industry learning and development experts Diana Monk, VP of learning solutions at Charter Communications; Martha Soehren, former chief talent development officer at Comcast and current executive development adviser and coach; and Allyson Crawford, VP of talent management at WOW! Internet, Cable & Phone, so they could share their thoughts on how the pandemic has changed workplace practices, behaviors and culture.

Spoiler alert: Even change caused by a global crisis can create opportunities for the future.

### Trust, Freedom Speed Innovation

While most organizations like to say they grant their employees the freedom to innovate, this principle wasn't really tested until the pandemic caused a

sudden and dramatic shift in the way people work. Leaders had no choice but to allow people at all levels to do what they needed to do to get their work done.

Rather than the feared outcome of remote workers becoming disengaged and unproductive, the new flexibility increased engagement and productivity. "There were a couple of factors that felt very prominent during the pandemic, and one of those was how we built a trust factor that people would get the work done, that they would do what they needed to do," Soehren said. "And the second of those was that we gave people the freedom to create a new way of working, a new way of being productive, a new way of interacting and I think that those capabilities will help us immensely moving forward in a more intrapreneurial world."

### The Need for Agility Activated Culture Change

Large industry organizations tend to



*At the start of the pandemic, organizations needed to adapt extremely quickly, so decision hierarchies and lengthy processes were thrown to the wind — with surprising results.*

have bureaucratic cultures, which means big change happens slowly. At the start of the pandemic, organizations needed to adapt extremely quickly, so decision hierarchies and lengthy processes were thrown to the wind — with surprising results.

"It's amazing to reflect on how quickly we were able to move some employees — for example, our call center agents to their homes," Monk said. "I was talking with some members of our IT team, and they said, 'If someone had put a project plan in front of us and said how long will it take you to move your call centers to 50% at home and 50% in the office, the answer would've been somewhere around nine months.' We did it in less than two weeks because we had to. The lesson on the need for agility there is pretty strong."

### Empowered, Engaged Employees

If employees are given the freedom to try new things without fear of reprisal, the result is greater engagement. Some organizations have realized the benefits of this shift and are planning to build greater agility into their cultural touchstones moving forward.

"We're making decisions more quickly," Crawford said. "It's exciting. We're seeing engagement increasing. We're empowering our employees, our leaders, to make decisions at a different level." Added Crawford, "I think the real gift of the pandemic is we're seeing a lot more generation of ideas by even our frontline employees because we're asking for more opinions."

Cultivating leaders from within and engaging high performers are essential to holding on to top talent. Engaged employees are 87% less likely to leave their organization, and this is especially important in the new competitive employment market.

The pandemic has been a crash course in the need for organizations to demonstrate agility and empower employees. Now, our job is to take what we've learned and use it to ride the wave of change — lest we risk going under. ●

**Janice Silver is the VP of Intrapreneurship Academy at The Cable Center, which provides intrapreneurship and innovation education, conferences and thought leadership to industry professionals.**





By Joanna Ruttner, Broadbeam Media  
@broadbeammedia

# Streaming Spend: A Complicated Calculation

Most consumers are spending more than they think on monthly OTT subscriptions

**T**he world of streaming is fragmented and complicated. It's hard to keep track of all the providers and ways of accessing OTT. It turns out it is also hard for consumers to keep track of their streaming subscription costs. We found that most consumers are underestimating their monthly expenditure on subscription services by 35%.

We asked 1,000 consumers to estimate the amount they spent on streaming services each month, then calculated their actual costs based on the services they then reported paying for. The average estimated spend was about \$49, while the average calculated expenditure each month was \$66.

## Everyone's Undercounting

For both estimated and calculated payments, the average spend was about \$15 higher than the median spend. This indicates that some people pay a lot for streaming services, pushing up the average. Slicing into the data, we can see that two groups in particular pushed up the averages—those with high wealth and parents. Both groups tended to far underestimate their spend, with high-wealth groups spending an estimated \$60 monthly and parents \$56. For both groups, calculated spends were over \$85 per month.

While parents and wealthier

consumers are paying a lot more than they think, on average, all groups of consumers are miscalculating their monthly expenditure on streaming services. There is one exception, though—seniors are the one group spending less than they think they are, with a monthly bill \$14 less than their estimated spend of \$48. Why would seniors think their streaming content costs more than it does? They also tend to have a cable subscription. The premium price of a cable bundle and use of smart TV remotes may cause seniors to lump all services into one number in their heads.

Across all consumers, clear patterns emerge for SVOD penetration and subscriptions. Which services are adding up to that average of \$66 per month? Netflix is the clear dominant SVOD; three out of four people had watched it in the last 30 days. Amazon Prime was the second most popular SVOD and growing the fastest in penetration over the past year. From a total viewer perspective, Hulu rounded out third place in reach. However, the vast majority of Hulu's viewers were reachable by ads, either in the Live TV service or VOD with ads. In fact, only 10% of Hulu's viewers were not reachable by ads, confirming the scale advantage many advertisers are seeing on Hulu.

Apple TV Plus had the smallest reach of

any subscription-only streaming service, with just 11% of our respondents paying for it. Like many Apple products, we also saw a coastal geographic skew of Apple TV Plus, especially New England and California. HBO Max followed this same geographic pattern, but had almost three times as much reach as Apple TV Plus.

Parents are strong SVOD users, but are more or less willing to watch ads depending on how old their children are. Households with kids under 8 were the most likely to watch SVODs. Households with older children were slightly more likely to watch ad-supported content types.

## Parents Avoid Ads

Like avoiding a street when the ice cream man arrives, we know parents might be sensitive to exposing small children to ads. However, teenagers may be a factor in adoption of newer free media sources, driving penetration numbers up in those households.

For some groups of viewers, we can see there is low price sensitivity to streaming subscriptions. For parents, the value of ad-free content seems established, and we can expect services to move from new additions to necessities. Seniors may be anchored by the premium price sticker on cable and be less sensitive to bundled services. As marketers, we know consumers will always pay for choice if they can afford it, as we've seen with higher wealth households seeing the value in access to all streaming content.

For other groups of viewers, we can expect that the piling on of services will add up to some serious price shock and increased interest in cheaper ad-supported alternatives. Younger, single-person and lower income households will take the time to hunt for deals and alternatives.

The price anchor is untethered for both price-sensitive and more tolerant streaming viewers. As the industry figures out consumers' tolerance for subscription fees, it's important to consider that most consumers haven't yet decided on their price tolerance, either. ●

**Joanna Ruttner is VP, account director for Broadbeam Media, an independent performance media agency that approaches media planning and buying by finding pockets of undervalued inventory in the fragmented digital video landscape, including direct response television, advanced TV and digital.**



# Ramsey Naito

President, Nickelodeon Animation

**Pandemic doesn't slow down prolific in-house studio, or its boss**

**T**he COVID-19 pandemic has not slowed down the Nickelodeon animation machine as it continues to grind out both new series and reboots of classic network shows under the auspices of network animation president Ramsey Naito.

Nickelodeon Animation has more than 50 series and movie projects in development, including movie projects for *Blue's Clues*, *Baby Shark* and *The Loud House* as well as new TV featuring classic franchises as *The Smurfs*, *Avatar*, *SpongeBob SquarePants*, *Paw Patrol* and *Star Trek*, along with a series based on the best-selling *Big Nate* children's books. That's on top of rebooting such iconic animated shows such as *Rugrats*, which is currently airing on ViacomCBS streaming service Paramount Plus.

Naito, who oversees Nickelodeon's animation content across all formats and platforms from linear television to streaming and theatrical movies, paints the division's future strategy for B+C/Multichannel News senior content producer, programming R. Thomas Umstead. The interview was edited for space and clarity.

**Growing up, did you have aspirations of working in animation?**

I never thought I'd work in animation. I loved animation but, the closest thing to animators that I knew were illustrators or graphic designers. It wasn't until I went to CalArts [California Institute of the Arts] for grad school that I was introduced to the world of animation.

**Is animation as popular today than it's ever been, given all of the different platforms and distribution outlets that we have?** I think animation today is more popular than ever. There are so many ways to access animation, and because of that I think that people have been able to tap into and watch all styles of animation. Kids today can go on their phone and watch *Looney Tunes*, *SpongeBob* or anime from Japan. I also think that animation really persevered during the pandemic.

**How much did the pandemic impact Nickelodeon's animation production, and how were you able to navigate through it?** No question that it impacted us, but literally within one week [after the shutdown] we pivoted to a work-from-home workflow. Everyone was set up at home to continue doing their jobs, from designing, storyboarding, writing, editing — you name it. We were able to sustain our entire studio production pipeline from home. As a result, we became really in demand. This past year we've hired over 500 artists at the studio because of all the shows we've green-lit, all the season renewals and all the movies. We were really able to continue our production strategy and grow our content pipeline.

**It seems Nickelodeon is going back to its animation roots for new original programming with reboots of *Rugrats* and *Blue's Clues*. How much of Nickelodeon's animation past will factor into its animation future?** I started my career working on Nickelodeon shows as a [production assistant] 20 years

**BONUS FIVE**

**What's your favorite non-animated TV show?** *The Sopranos*.

**What are your all-time favorite animated characters?** Chip 'n' Dale.

**What is your favorite podcast?** *The Sarah Silverman Podcast*, hands down.

**What streaming services do you subscribe to?** Paramount Plus.

**What is your favorite vacation bucket destination?** Punta del Este, Uruguay.

ago — I was at the studio when Steve Hillenburg made *SpongeBob* — so coming back in this capacity I've seen Nickelodeon [animation] grow with titles like *SpongeBob*, *Avatar* and now *Star Trek* that speak to multiple generations of viewers, including grandparents, parents, uncles and aunts. So by reinvigorating these titles we're able to speak to families. Parents can invite their kids to watch and experience a show or a franchise that they love. There's real power there. At the same time we are still invested in our animated originals. It's a big part of our DNA, and we have a new generation of creators that have new ideas that are adding to this wonderfully rich library that Nickelodeon already has.

**What role does animation play in the overall legacy of Nickelodeon?** It may be the heart and soul of the brand. We are a kids' network, and animation is beloved by kids and family. Every now and then, you get something like *SpongeBob* that just speaks to all audiences, but animation is hugely important to the brand within our library and within the lines of business that it creates for the company, including consumer products. In short, animation is probably the heart and soul of Nickelodeon. ●





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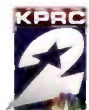


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