

# Cablefax Daily™

Monday — July 3, 2017

What the Industry Reads First

Volume 28 / No. 126

## Ready to Ride: Cowboy Channel Launches on Linear, Readies OTT Play

There aren't a lot of new linear channels launching these days, but **Rural Media** founder/pres *Patrick Gottsch* believes the programmer has found an underserved niche with western lifestyle. On Saturday, **FamilyNet** will lose its lineup of old sitcoms and rebrand as **The Cowboy Channel**, with weekly **Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association** events. That's been the goal since Rural Media bought FamilyNet in 2012, but it's taken a few years for the company to build up a big enough library. After being unsuccessful with an initial attempt to score rights to the Wrangler National Finals Rodeo, Rural Media set aside the idea of a companion western channel for its main **RFD-TV** network. It used the time to create a western-themed **SiriusXM** channel along with its own rodeo event, The American, which takes place at **AT&T Stadium** in Arlington, TX. "It's grown to be the world's largest one-day, richest rodeos in the world," Gottsch said. **CBS** began airing the event along with RFD-TV. The rodeo made history in 2013 when bareback rider *Richmond Champion* became the first cowboy to win more than \$1mln for a single, eight-second ride. Cowboy Channel will keep FamilyNet's 30mln sub base, and Gottsch is hopeful that it will gain more carriage, especially given that there's no affiliate fee for it. Cowboy will be working especially hard to lasso a deal with **DirectTV**, which carries RFD-TV but not FamilyNet. Rural Media also is gearing up to launch a \$9.99/month, direct-to-consumer offering with expanded content come Sept. 1. "We could have three 24-hour networks, and it wouldn't all fit," Gottsch said. "If you want to have the ability to offer 33 rodeos over the next 10 days, you have to have an over-the-top service." There seems to be a real interest in western content. Non-rated **CBS Sports Net** has grown its collection of rodeo programming. It has been **Professional Bull Riders'** primary TV partner since 2012 and is the exclusive home of the PBR World Finals. It also signed a multiyear deal in 2014 with the PRCA and is the exclusive TV partner for National Finals of Rodeo. As for Cowboy Channel programming, originals will make up the bulk of the lineup, including every 10th round from the Wrangler NRF since 1985, the Calgary Stampede and "Debbe Dunning's Dude Ranch Roundup" (you'll recognize Dunning as a former "Home Improvement" Tool Time assistant). No existing program will move from RFD-TV to Cowboy Channel, though there will be a couple of programs that air on both nets, such as "Best of America by Horseback." The Cowboy Channel is using **DISH's** Sling Studio for a lot of its events, giving it the ability to do a three- or four-camera shoot on location in an arena

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with wireless cameras vs the expensive production trucks of a few years ago. Since the November election, Gottsch has seen more interest in rural America from advertisers and program directors. He said he's even had a nice meeting with **Comcast**, who he criticized in Hill hearings a few years back about the then-proposed Time Warner Cable-Comcast combo given RFD's loss of carriage in some markets. "There's an interest now from folks who want to hear more about rural America and programming," the exec said.

**Worth Watching:** Keep an eye on **Charter's** non-sports skinny package, Spectrum TV Stream. It starts at \$19.95 per month for select Spectrum Internet subs on a test basis. **ESPN**, whose nets are typically included in operators' basic offerings, said in a statement that operators "have always had a right to create smaller packages," but the "fundamental distribution requirement for ESPN has not changed, which requires that ESPN be carried in the first or second highest penetrated tier of service." In other words, Charter could run into issues with the sports behemoth if it decides to offer Spectrum TV Stream more widely. [Get the full story at Cablefax.com.](#)

**Building Owner Sues Charter over Wires:** Charter was hit with a lawsuit in NY State Supreme Court, with property developers and lessees claiming it has left wires, amplifiers and other materials on the roof of property in a trendy NYC neighborhood. Charter declined comment Friday. The dispute involves buildings at 413-421 West 14th Street, with the complaint alleging that Charter trespassed on the premises and left equipment that is believed to be used to provide telecom services to other properties, but not to the actual premises. "Despite numerous demands by plaintiffs that defendants remove the unauthorized equipment, defendants have failed and refused... and have, in fact, added more equipment to the roof of the premises," said the lawsuit, filed June 20. The complaint alleges the demands to remove equipment have been going on since last September and have delayed construction and created hazardous conditions.

**Arbitrary Arbitration:** A group of senators led by *Al Franken* (D-MN) on Friday received **AT&T's** response to their request that the company put an end to its use of forced arbitration clauses in customer contracts. AT&T evp, federal relations *Timothy McKone* in his seven-page response insisted that AT&T honors the deals and promotions it offers and treats its customers fairly. He also argued the arbitration isn't "forced," as customers are choosing to receive service from AT&T or **DirecTV**. Furthermore, McKone asserts that AT&T's arbitration system is "extremely customer-friendly," and that customers also have the right to have their complaints heard in small claims court instead of in arbitration. Franken, however, was not satisfied. "There's nothing 'friendly' about AT&T's take-it-or-leave-it contracts that eliminate consumer choice and take away Americans' ability to resolve legal disputes with their telecom provider in a court of law," he wrote in response. "Further, forced arbitration agreements that prohibit customers from banding together as a class deter consumers from seeking justice and allow widespread wrongdoing by powerful corporations to go unchecked."

**Ratings:** The College World Series, which concluded Tuesday, averaged 1.1mln viewers through 16 games on the **ESPN** family of networks. The best-of-three championship series between Florida and LSU, which only lasted two games, drew an average of 1.9mln viewers on ESPN, making it the most-watched finals since 2014. This year's tournament was also the net's most-streamed CWS on record.

**Another Layer:** **Layer3** TV on Friday introduced its first 24/7 linear channel in 4K, **NASA TV UHD**. The channel is powered by **Harmonic**. Customers will also have access to a selection of on-demand 4K programming. **BBC America** earlier this year made "Planet Earth II" available in 4K to Layer3 customers. The provider says 20% of its subscribers have watched at least one episode.

**Clearer Vue:** Virtual MVPD **PlayStation Vue** added 17 new local **Fox** affiliates this week. That news comes in the wake of Fox rolling out a national feed for **Hulu** to run in markets without affiliate deals. The new crop of PS Vue Fox affiliate markets includes Baltimore, Cleveland-Akron (Canton), Columbus, Denver, Hartford and New Haven, Indianapolis, KC, Milwaukee, Nashville, Pittsburgh, Portland, Sacramento-Stockton-Modesto, Salt Lake City, San Antonio, San Diego, Seattle-Tacoma and St. Louis.

**Programming:** **Showtime** is making the first five episodes of its ongoing drama series, "I'm Dying Up Here," available to non-subscribers for free on **YouTube**. Four of those eps have already aired, while the fifth is scheduled to make its on-air debut July 9.