

Cablefax Daily™

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What the Industry Reads First

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SXSW Festival: It's Not Just for Programmers

When **SXSW** kicks off Friday in Austin, there will be the usual bevy of cable programmers in the mix. But scattered among the presenters and conference goers will be a number of cable tech execs seeking serendipity and cross-industry pollination. A **Cox** contingent will be there looking for, among other things, different smart home technologies. While Cox doesn't see SXSW as the place for on-site deal-making, a rep says the MSO expects to find new technology "across a wide range of industries while making new connections." The annual gathering's Interactive Festival runs through Tuesday. "We absolutely expect surprises," said *Maria Esposito*, senior communications specialist for Cox. "That's the beauty of SXSW—people come to be surprised and challenged by the new ideas that surface there." Some of cable's involvement at SXSW goes beyond what you might expect. Take **CableLabs'** meet-up Tuesday on "Neurodiversity in the Workplace." It's intended to encourage industry HR to employ people with "brains wired differently," such as those on the autism spectrum. CableLabs pres/CEO *Phil McKinney* argues doing so fosters innovation because the new hires approach the creative process in unique ways, adding, "The more diverse your group, the more high functioning your organization is." Of course, with net neutrality and internet adoption talk prevalent, broadband will be front and center at SXSW. The lineup includes **FCC** commish *Mignon Clyburn* speaking on net neutrality Saturday morning. *Shirley Bloomfield*, CEO of **NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association**, will discuss rural-urban divides on Friday. "Given SXSW's reputation as an international platform for technology and innovation and the increasing national attention on bridging the digital divide, it will be an excellent venue to highlight the challenges of building and sustaining broadband networks in low-density, rural communities," she said, adding that the recent infrastructure proposals from the White House and Congress make the timing "impeccable." Then there's virtual and augmented reality—mainstays at any consumer-facing conference. *David Bohrman*, president of **The Bohrman Group**, predicts that within 10 years, cable news hosts and remote guests could commonly face off as holograms. Bigger budgets and news audiences make election years ideal for launching such innovations, and mid-terms are good years to test them, the former CNN election news producer said. He's hosting a SXSW talk dubbed "Politics, Television and Innovation" that will feature on-screen technologies used in election coverage, such as holograms and demographic touch-screen displays. SXSW



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has long been a must-attend affair for programmers, and this year is no different. “The festival has become a hub for unique experiences,” said **AT&T Audience Network** marketing director *Lisa Pue Chinery*. Audience Net will promote espionage thriller “CONDOR” at the festival, setting up an interactive CONDOR Headquarters that includes RFID and lie-detection technology. The 15-minute interactive experience takes place in an Austin house; attendees can spend extra time in the back yard to charge their phones and win prizes. Other fan experiences includes **Starz’s** fully immersive “Sensory House,” inviting attendees on a journey of sight, smell, taste, touch and sound through the offerings of local female artisans. Examples include sampling perfume scents inspired by characters in “Sweetbitter” as well as custom cocktails and on-site printed T-shirts. **HBO** expects to draw 3,500 SXSW attendees to an immersive experience held in a two-acre park simulating “Westworld.” According to *Steven Cardwell*, HBO director of program marketing, participants will spend two hours following dozens of hosts across multiple narratives and search for clues about the series’ second season. SXSW also gives programmers a chance to talk shop. Take Tuesday’s panel “Live Tweets in a Binge World,” which offers tips for marketers striving to drive live tune-in. Among the presenters is **A&E** social media manager *Sue Funke*, who recommends getting everyone involved in real time. “When a brand or a show, or even better the stars of the show, post on social as they watch along with fans, it makes people want to tune in live to feel as though they’re having an interactive experience,” she said. - *Monica Hogan*

FCC Waves Goodbye to Comcast RSN Complaint: The **FCC** Media Bureau this week dismissed **Wave Broadband’s** complaint alleging that **Comcast**-owned RSNs are engaging in unfair business practices. The Bureau characterized the dispute as a program access complaint, which means Wave had missed the deadline for filing a complaint within one year of entering into a contract. The complaint was filed in December, near the end of the three-year contract. Wave had tried to get the FCC to treat the dispute as a petition for declaratory ruling instead of a program access complaint, but the Bureau said there’s no basis for such treatment. At issue is a clause in the contract requiring Wave to deliver **NBC Sports Northwest**, **NBC Sports California** and **NBC Sports Bay Area** at certain subscriber penetration levels. Wave had to pay more than \$2mIn in damages for failing to meet those thresholds—penetration levels that it maintains were hampered by NBC Sports entering into alternative distribution deals with OTT providers. The FCC didn’t address the merits of the argument because of the one-year limit for bringing a program access complaint. It also said Wave didn’t provide a reason to justify waiving the one-year limit. In January, **TPG** completed its acquisition of Wave, combining it with **RCN/Grande**. Comcast has argued that the complaint is moot because Wave systems can now carry the RSNs under RCN’s contract, which was just renewed at the end of December.

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Auction Money: The FCC said it's time to release some more money for broadcasters and MVPDs for reimbursement for expenses related to the spectrum repack. The additional allocation from the TV Broadcaster Relocation Fund is expected in the next four to six weeks. The FCC said it has received verified and unverified expenses that total approx \$1.95bln, a total already higher than the \$1.75bln allocated to the fund. The reimbursement need is expected to continue to rise. The Ray Baum Act, which passed the House unanimously this week, will free up more money for reimbursements.

Blockchain and Bitcoin: Comcast Ventures is diving deeper in the blockchain business with its backing of **Blockdaemon**. Blockchain is a digitalized accounting record of all cryptocurrency transactions. Originally developed as an accounting method for **Bitcoin**, it's now used to verify transactions. The Blockdaemon platform, which aims to provide easy deployment, connection and management of nodes revealed a \$3.275mln seed round investment led by Comcast Ventures. Other backers include **Boldstart Ventures, MState** and **Plug & Play**. Comcast Ventures managing director *Gil Beyda* will also be joining the startup's board. Comcast is investing heavily in blockchain technology, forming what it calls "The Blockchain Crew" to lead its efforts. The team consists of Beyda, head of funds *Amy Banse*, managing director *Sam Landman*, principal *Teddy Himler* and *Morgan Polotan*. Comcast Ventures joined **IBM** in offering support to **mState**, an investor in blockchain startups in January.

To the Senate: Sen John Kennedy (R-LA) filed the Open Internet Preservation Act Tuesday in an effort to prevent ISPs from slowing down and controlling web content. Giving greater protection to consumers and demanding transparency, the legislation also requires ISPs to make their terms of service public. The House companion of the bill was introduced last year by Rep Marsha Blackburn (R-TN). "This bill strikes a compromise that benefits the consumer," Kennedy said, demanding cooperation from Democrats in Congress. "Does this bill resolve every issue in the net neutrality debate? No, it doesn't. It's not a silver bullet. But it's a good start."

Full Duplex: CableLabs launched its Full Duplex Coherent Optics technology, doubling the bi-directional capacity of cable access fiber network. The technology also multiplies the capacity of each existing access network fiber more than 200 times over. Full Duplex will be incorporated into CableLabs' P2P Coherent Optics specification effort, to be issued in mid-2018.

South of the Border: DirecTV Latin America is looking to go public, filing with the SEC for an initial offering of as much as \$100mln. The Class A common stock would be listed under the symbol "VRIO." AT&T has an IPO for **Vrio Corp**, the holding company for its South American and Caribbean satellite businesses. AT&T could be making moves to sell DirecTV Latin America to pay off debts that will be accumulated when (if?) it closes its acquisition of **Time Warner**. DirecTV Latin America's assets have been valued at close to \$10bln.

Univision CEO Shakeup: After the departure of CFO *Frank Lopez-Balboa* and its decision to end plans to go public, **Univision** is also losing its CEO. *Randy Falco* will retire at the end of the year, despite having extended his contract through 2020 last November. "Recently, Randy came to us and told us he would like to retire at the end of 2018 when he will turn 65 years old and end an outstanding eight year tenure as the CEO of Univision," board chmn *Haim Saban* said in a statement. "We at the Board of Univision have reluctantly agreed to Randy's wishes out of respect and the high regard we have for him as a partner." The board has asked for Falco's assistance in restructuring the company and during the transition to new leadership over the next year.

Taking to the Air: Cox Communications and Drone Racing League have come to a national sponsorship agreement. The cable op will air a custom commercial spot showcasing drone pilot Nick "WildWilly" Wizard. WildWilly will act as the Cox pilot in the 2018 DRL Allianz World Championship Season, competing against 17 other custom-built DRL drones through racecourses around the globe. The seven-event series will be broadcast on **ESPN, Sky Sports, ProSiebenSat. 1, OSN, Fox Sports Asia** and **Disney XD**.

Cartoon Upfront: **Cartoon Network** revealed its largest content slate ever at its upfront presentation. It'll add *Owen Dennis's* "Infinity Train" and *Diego Molano's* Latin American supernatural comedy "Victor and Valentino" to its lineup, which recently welcomed *George Gendi's* "Apple & Onion" and "Unikitty!." In addition to its content offerings, the network is developing more than 30 new games and apps for its mobile and web portfolio.

People: The Madison Square Garden Company named **Oath Studios** vet *Victoria Parker* as evp of the company, effective March 12. -- **A+E Networks** boosted *Christopher Barry* to svp, head of finance, ad sales, distribution, international and digital. Barry first joined A+E in 2012 after serving as svp, digital media & business strategy for **AMC Networks** at **SundanceTV**.

PROGRAMMER'S PAGE

Behind the Scenes at the Bronx Zoo

Trying to corral a cast of humans is hard enough, but how do you go about producing a show when your talent includes Dave the Kangaroo and Mert the Goose? That's the challenge that comes with **Animal Planet's** "The Zoo," which premieres its second season Saturday at 9pm. The series is centered on the relationships between the staff and animals at the world-renowned Bronx Zoo. "When you go to the zoo, you have no appreciation for what goes on behind the scenes," executive producer *Lisa Lucas* said. "And I had no appreciation for the time and the quality of time that all these people spend with these animals day in and day out. To be able to bring that to light, it's an honor for us." The crew had to be nimble in order to adapt to the daily events at the zoo, adapting to allow for the animals to receive the best care possible. While certainly a challenge, the unpredictability was worth it to uncover smaller, surprising stories like that of Mert, an old goose who was treated for a tumor in the series' first season. "You don't know how the story's going to end, you don't know what an animal's going to do, but I also find beauty in that," Lucas said. "In a world where everything is so scripted and predictable, I like that you have to be prepared to cover the story that's unfolding." The behind-the-scenes experience made such an impact on the crew, there were never any thoughts of moving to another zoo. "Our intention was always to go back, and there are so many stories you want to follow up on," Lucas said. "We could probably be there for a decade and not tell all the stories there are to tell." – *Sara Winegardner*

Reviews: "Jane," 8pm, Monday, **Nat Geo, Nat Geo Wild.** If you have the pleasure of listening to *Jane Goodall* for an extended period, you'll realize she's a world-class storyteller. Since the mid-1980s Goodall's been traversing the globe nearly 300 days/year espousing conservation and animal protection. But that part of her 83 years is in the background of this outstanding and beautiful introduction to her early chimp studies. True to Goodall's personality, filmmaker *Brett Morgen* tells her story directly and simply, relying on gorgeous footage from *Hugo van Lawick*, much of which was assumed missing until recently. The footage is nowhere near as sharp as today's HD reels, but van Lawick's incredible eye makes up for that with room to spare. And a nod to *Philip Glass*, whose circular score depicts the rhythm of life. – "The Zimmern List," series premiere, 9pm, Tuesday, **Travel.** Noted chef and foodie *Andrew Zimmern* takes a bite out of crime. Literally. You can be arrested, he says, for visiting L.A. and not eating Thai food. Perhaps. But the FCC could take him down on multiple counts of food porn for this thoroughly delicious series' debut eps, which have Zimmern visiting favorite eating spots in L.A. and Austin. The enjoyment Zimmern derives at L.A. breakfast spot Eggslut and famed Langer's Deli... well, there oughta be a law! – *Seth Arenstein*

Basic Cable P2+ Prime Rankings* (2/26/18-3/4/18)		
Mon-Sun	MC US AA%	MC US AA (000)
FNC	0.737	2244
MSNBC	0.598	1821
HGTV	0.468	1424
ESPN	0.437	1331
USA	0.431	1313
TBSC	0.413	1258
DISC	0.380	1158
HIST	0.377	1147
AMC	0.344	1048
ID	0.343	1043
A&E	0.322	980
TNT	0.321	977
TLC	0.314	957
ADSM	0.305	928
NICK	0.295	899
CNN	0.284	865
FOOD	0.273	832
DSNY	0.259	789
NAN	0.259	787
CRN	0.255	775
HALL	0.225	686
TVLAND	0.220	670
FX	0.207	632
DSJR	0.205	624
BRAVO	0.201	612
APL	0.198	603
INSP	0.183	557
E!	0.175	533
VH1	0.168	511
NATGEO	0.163	496
LIFE	0.162	492
OWN	0.160	488
HMM	0.155	472
TRAVEL	0.155	471
NKJR	0.149	455
GSN	0.146	443
SYFY	0.145	442
PARA	0.145	441
WETV	0.138	419
HBO	0.137	418
MTV	0.133	405

*P2+ L+SD rankers are based on national Nielsen numbers, not coverage.

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