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What the Industry Reads First

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Speak Up: Industry Not Staying Silent on Black Lives Matter

Following a weekend of civil unrest and protests around the country (and world), media companies, operators and execs alike have spoken out and are showing solidarity with the African American community. **BET** issued a statement, saying “the assault on our communities through legal racism must end now. . . . Our community’s grief is not new; it is simply being filmed. . . oppression is the sin. Blackness is the blessing.” The network is asking for citizens to donate to organizations including **Black Voters Matter**, **Movement for Black Lives** and **LDF**, as well as linking to petitions to demand accountability for the deaths of *George Floyd*, *Breonna Taylor* and *Tony McDade*, and directing viewers to register to vote. Over at parent company **ViacomCBS**, all networks and platforms from the company’s entertainment and youth brands, and **CBS Sports**, **Nickelodeon** and **BET**, went dark on Monday at 5pm for eight minutes and 46 seconds—the length of time a police officer held his knee on Floyd’s neck. The spot is a black background and white typeface reading “I CAN’T BREATHE,” with audio playing the sound of breathing. The spot also featured a countdown and a call-to-action with partner **Color of Change**. The blackout served not just as a tribute to Floyd, but a remembrance for others who have been victims of racism, including Taylor and *Ahmaud Arbery*. The company will also participate in “Blackout Tuesday,” not holding any meetings or conducting any business, to stand with African Americans around the country. “While I am not a person of color and can never fully understand this experience, I am offended by the systemic racism and want to stand together with our communities of color in the hurt and pain,” pres of entertainment and youth brands *Chris McCarthy* wrote in an internal memo. “We must all do our part—discrimination against one of us is discrimination against all of us.” **Comcast** chmn/CEO *Brian Roberts* shared a message with employees, denouncing racism, injustice and violence. “Yet we continue to be unable to make enough progress in this country — so at this moment it is critical to step back, face the hard subjects and try to reflect,” Roberts wrote. “I have talked with employees and share their feelings of anger, frustration and outrage following the senseless killing of George Floyd, and other instances of violence against black people. These atrocities run counter to everything our company stands for.” **Verizon** chmn/CEO *Hans Vestberg* announced the company has committed \$10mln to social justice organizations, split equally among seven groups including the **NAACP** and **National Action Network**. “We cannot commit to a brand purpose of moving the world forward unless we are committed to helping ensure

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we move it forward for everyone. We stand united as one Verizon,” said Vestberg. **YouTube** pledged \$1mln in support of “efforts to address social injustice.” **Disney** execs promised employees “real change.” In a letter sent from *Bob Chapek*, *Bob Iger* and chief diversity officer *Latondra Newton*, the execs wrote “We, too, are struggling to make sense of the recent tragedies that leave us feeling overcome with sorrow. While we don’t have all the answers, we resolve to use our compassion, our creative ideas and our collective sense of humanity to ensure we are fostering a culture that acknowledges our people’s feelings and their pain.” **Starz** is elevating organizations Color of Change and the NAACP, asking viewers to donate, saying “we cannot stand silent while our Black communities continue to suffer under the weight of violence, discrimination and injustice.” An **AT&T** store was looted in Atlanta (as reported by **NBC** affil **WXIA**), but the company posted on Twitter that “the events of the past few days underscore the violence and racism faced by black people in America today. At AT&T we stand for equality and embrace freedom.” **WarnerMedia’s CNN** headquarters was vandalized in Atlanta during the protests, but newly-minted CEO *Jason Kilar* sent out an email to employees in solidarity with the black community. “I want to be very clear in saying that our responsibility to the Black community is that we truly listen, that we seek understanding, and that we do these things with as much empathy as possible. In no uncertain terms, we as a company are firmly in support of people that suffer injustice, including our own,” Kilar wrote. “My commitment to each of you is that I am going to do everything I can to lead with empathy and action in this moment, as the Black community deserves nothing less. It is better stated that the Black community deserves so much more.” On the government side, **FCC** chmn *Ajit Pai* has commended local broadcasters’ efforts covering the protests around the country. “Those who work for local television and radio stations are often putting themselves at personal risk to serve the public interest, and they must be allowed to do their jobs without being threatened or attacked. I hope that they and all Americans stay safe,” he wrote.

DISH Shakeup: Several big exec changes at **DISH**, starting with the departure of *Warren Schlichting* as group president, **Sling TV**. He’s being replaced by *Michael Schwimmer*, who returned to DISH in 2019 to lead international business and strategy. Sling lost 281K subs in 1Q20, a number **MoffettNathanson** analyst referred to as a “shock.” Schwimmer had first joined DISH in 1996, leading marketing, programming and media sales. He went on to serve as pres/CEO at **Fuse Media**, leaving shortly before it filed for Chapter 11 last April. Schwimmer reports to DISH pres *Erik Carlson*. DISH hired *Dave Mayo* as evp, network development, which puts him in charge of the company’s wireless buildout strategy and execution of its 5G network. Mayo, who most recently led **T-Mobile’s** IoT business, reports to chmn *Charlie Ergen*. DISH also promoted *Jeff Blum* to evp, external and legislative affairs and named *John Swieringa* group pres, retail wireless (he will retain his duties as COO). *Andy LeCuyer* will continue to serve as programming svp, but will now report to Carlson.



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WWE Network Opens Free Tier: WWE launched a free version of DTC product **WWE Network** Monday. Fans who sign up for the free edition will gain access to more than 15K titles including recent episodes of “Monday Night Raw,” “Friday Night SmackDown” and “NXT.” It will also showcase new series like “Raw Talk,” streaming Monday nights, and select historical pay-per-views. WWE Network’s free version will not be ad-supported at launch, but no promises that things will stay that way in the future. WWE has recently been looking for ways to revamp strategies surrounding its six-year-old streamer. During the company’s 4Q19 earnings call in February, chmn/CEO *Vince McMahon* said the company was exploring offering different tiers of the service as well as opportunities to license its content. “Right now, there’s no more better time to exercise the selling of our rights to all the majors. And quite frankly, all the majors are really clamoring for our content, so that could be a significant increase in terms of revenue,” McMahon said on the call.

Comcast Business At Home: Comcast introduced a service Monday allowing businesses of all sizes to provide remote workers a dedicated, independent internet connection at home. The idea for the service, called Comcast Business At Home, came after Comcast’s SMB customers said that while home networks were holding up, there were still concerns about the amount of traffic hitting those networks. “What we heard from customers was, gosh, it would be great to have the ability to put a dedicated business line into a home and take the friction out,” Comcast vp, product *Christian Nascimento* told **CFX**. Along with the installation of a dedicated business line, the service includes mobility solutions and enhanced security features. Comcast said the service is available for any business, but is ideally suited for those in service-oriented industries including legal, accounting, advertising, healthcare and insurance.

Cheddar Merges into One: Cheddar is unifying its finance and news networks into one Cheddar with the new tagline, “News Worth Investing In.” “The network will stay true to its business focus on technology, media, and innovation and also include the top stories of the day that are worth ‘investing’ your time in,” said *Jon Steinberg*, pres, **Altice** News and Advertising. The net’s also adding an evening show called, “News Wrap.” Altice USA bought Cheddar last year. The net is available on **Optimum, Suddenlink, YouTube TV, Spectrum, Sling** and others, with a reach of 10mln homes. Cheddar has been broadcasting from home because of COVID-19, but began returning a small number of anchors to its studio Monday. “Regretfully, like almost every media company, we had a layoff, which meant saying goodbye to some of the anchors, producers and professionals that got us to where we are today, and those decisions were very difficult,” Steinberg said.

Accelerated C-band Clearing a Go: The **FCC Wireless Telecommunications Bureau** has secured commitments from all eligible satellite operators to meet an accelerated clearing timeline that will lead to faster 5G deployment on the 3.7GHz band, also known as the C-band. Existing satellite operators are required by the FCC to repack their operations from the entirety of the band to the upper 200MHz, leaving the lower 280MHz for terrestrial flexible use and space for a 20MHz guard band in between. The five satellite operators eligible for the accelerated clearing track are **Eutelsat, Intelsat, SES, Star One** and **Telesat**. If the companies fulfill their commitments, they will be eligible for up to \$9.7bln in accelerated relocation payments as well as reasonable relocation costs to be paid for by the new flexible use licenses available in the auction scheduled to kick off on Dec 8. They must clear 120MHz of spectrum in 46 PEAs by Dec 5, 2021 to meet the first deadline.

T-Mobile Wins Alaskan 5G: T-Mobile and **GCI** announced a partnership that will allow T-Mobile customers with 5G smartphones to tap into 5G while roaming in Anchorage. The deal also gives GCI customers roaming access to T-Mobile’s 5G network. T-Mobile claims that the partnership makes it the first and only wireless provider to offer 5G coverage across all 50 states.

Acquisitions: **Xperi** and **TiVo** completed their merger Monday. The pair are now combined under Xperi Holding Corporation. Starting Tuesday, the shares of the combined company will continue to trade on the stock market under the Xperi ticker symbol XPER. -- **Vyve Broadband** completed the purchase of **FamilyView Cablevision** in and around areas of Pickens and Anderson Counties in South Carolina. Vyve has already begun upgrades to the FamilyView Cablevision system to eventually deliver broadband speeds up to 1 Gig.

Distribution: **fuboTV** launched on Xbox One, marking the first time the streamer is available on a gaming console.

On the (Virtual) Circuit: The **Emma Bowen Foundation’s** annual summer conference will be going virtual. The Summer 2020 Conference, themed “Refocusing Our Lens,” will take place July 13-15.

People: **WarnerMedia** named *Richard Tom* to the position of CTO, effective immediately. He’ll replace *Jeremy Legg*, who is joining **AT&T** to lead its technology services organization as evp/CTO. Tom’s previous experience includes serving as CTO/svp of **Hulu** and **Verizon’s** CTO, digital entertainment. -- *Syrinthia Studer* has been tapped as evp, **Nickelodeon** and **Awesomeness Films**. She most recently served as **Paramount Pictures’** evp, worldwide acquisitions.