

Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Hear Me Out: Broadcasters Talk Big Tech, Pandemic Effects

Broadcasters and their local stations have been key to informing their communities during the entirety of the COVID-19 pandemic, and they have plenty of thoughts on what regulators should be thinking about as they examine how to regulate Big Tech platforms.

“Tech platforms rely on advertising, broadcasters rely on advertising, but we’re not in the same business... one is a distribution platform, but an echo chamber in some regards. Local journalists are what they always have been—truth tellers, holding people accountable, assisting communities with food drives. That ecosystem is fragile,” **Hearst Television** pres *Jordan Wertlieb* told incoming **NAB** president/CEO *Curtis LeGeyt* during the virtual NAB Show Premiere opening session Monday. “If we’re treated the same, I don’t think the local journalists can thrive or survive.”

Graham Media Group president/CEO *Emily Barr* said the situation is a tricky one as the relationship between Big Tech and broadcasters is one of codependency. Broadcasters use social media to disseminate events that they’re covering, but at the same time, there is a risk that the broadcasters’ reputations could be tainted by disinformation on the platforms.

Social media platforms have also contributed to the growing negative perception of the media on a national scale, and the issue has reached a point where Barr said photographers at Graham stations have been attacked while covering a story.

“This year was a gamechanger where you hid your credentials. You didn’t want to have a marked car there because suddenly you became targets. The national narrative somehow became that the press was the enemy,” Wertlieb said.

On the brighter note, **Salem Media Group** president, broadcast media *Dave Santrella* said the pandemic has served as a great reminder of the role local broadcasters play in the communities they serve. While the company had already integrated acts of kindness into the types of programming it offered, the pandemic allowed Salem to reach out even more. “It also allowed for great innovation. It allowed us to launch some new platforms and to try some new things because we needed to find new ways to generate revenue,” he said. For example, Salem developed on-demand video platform Salem Now as well as its own podcast network.

The pandemic also led to some major changes in how larger station groups communicated with their local affiliates and the steps they’re taking to ensure the people working at those stations truly reflect the communities they serve.

“You can look at any TV station in terms of what’s on air and it will look pretty much like a cross-section of that community. But you have to peel back that onion and go back behind the scenes and say how many of your news directors, how many of your executive producers, how many of your managers... these are questions that are hard for all of us because we would probably all admit that we haven’t done as good a job as we should have,” Barr said. She said the last 12 months

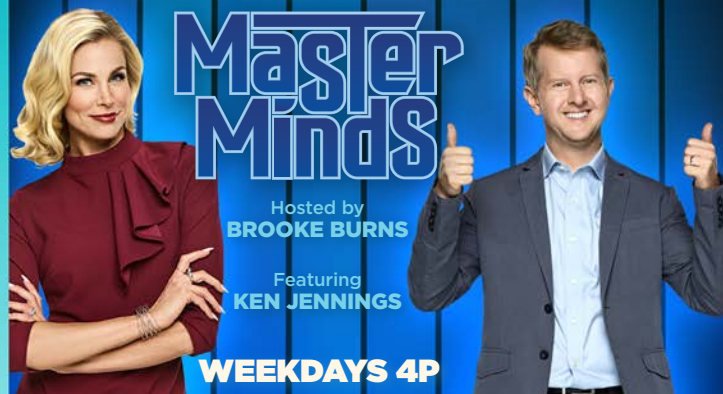
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have led to a major awakening for her personally, and Graham hired *Caroline Chambers* to serve as its first senior director, diversity and inclusion in October.

Wertlieb said the biggest takeaway above all else is how important regular communication is with all employees. He used to travel to each of Hearst’s stations every year to hold town halls, but he’s had more group-wide communications over the past year than ever before. “The entire company on a Zoom call, an open forum to discuss issues,” he said. “We’ve discussed everything from the COVID issues to racial injustice to our return to office plans. The communications are certainly something that’s going to go forward.”

CABLE ONE, HARGRAY COMBO

Cable One is hoping the **FCC** will approve its \$2.2 billion deal for **Hargray Communications** by the end of the month so that it can close the transaction by May 1. The companies already have received all other regulatory approvals, including applicable state approvals, they said in a recent regulatory filing. After announcing the deal in February, the companies asked the FCC for a streamlined approval process, saying the transaction will be seamless to consumers and will not result in any discontinuance or impairment of Hargray’s services. Cable One picked up 15% of Hargray in October in exchange for its Anniston, Alabama, system. The purchase price represents 17.2x multiple of Hargray’s 4Q LQA adjusted EBITDA before taking into account estimate run-rate synergies and 12.7x after assuming the immediate realization in full of the \$45 million in estimated run-rate synergies that Cable One expects to realize within three years of closing the transaction.

COMPANIES, ORGS WANT BROADBAND SUBSIDY

More than 50 groups and organizations signed a letter last week asking Congress to make the Emergency Broadband Benefit program permanent. “It’s time for Congress to adopt a long-term federally-funded broadband benefit program that the FCC would manage and administer to provide low-income individuals with enhanced financial support for broadband long after the pandemic ends. This new program should provide consumers with a higher benefit than the current \$9.25 available from Lifeline,” said the letter signed by **AT&T, ACA Connects, Charter, Comcast, Grub-hub, NAACP, T-Mobile** and others. They want the new long-term broadband subsidy program to remove the current requirement that a provider become an Eligible Telecom Carrier to participate and to ensure it has staying power by receiving mandatory directed spending from Congress vs a discretionary appropriations process. Congress should also support grant programs to empower state and local governments, school districts, and community nonprofits to pilot and scale effective outreach to under-resourced communities and multilingual digital literacy training programs, the groups said.

INFRASTRUCTURE WATCH

It’s Infrastructure Week. Again. “The major investor concern this week, and we suspect every week until there is some resolution, is the potential outcome of the *Biden* Infrastructure Plan relating to broadband,” **New Street Research Blair Levin** penned in a report this week. The investment firms subscribes to a bull case scenario that neither overbuilding and price regulation—cable’s biggest fears with the package—will be implemented. Levin’s theory is that corralling all Dems on the infrastructure bill will be much harder than the American Rescue Plan legislation and

Mark Your Calendars!

Cablefax Award Submission Deadlines:

The FAXIES Awards	Entry Deadline: March 19 Final Deadline: March 26
Cablefax 100 Nominations	April 9
Top Ops Nominations	April 23
The Diversity List Nominations	July 16
Most Powerful Women Nominations	September 10
Program Awards	Entry Deadline: November 19 Final Deadline: December 3



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that multiple bills tackling broadband will be introduced and hammered out. “We think the data from this week reinforces the bull case more than the bear case but there are significant headline risks ahead and we think, more than in most policy proceedings, close monitoring, particularly of Congressional activity, is required,” the New Street report warned. **NCTA** chief *Michael Powell* is making the rounds, appearing Friday on C-SPAN’s “Communicators.” Biden’s plan put the thumb on the scale for municipal broadband, which he argued has been largely unsuccessful outside of Chattanooga. “If the federal government is attempting to solve the problems for the nation, they should incorporate them where they make sense. But they shouldn’t see them as the exclusive or prioritized solution because the vast majority of networks in the country are built with private capital by private providers,” he said. “If it were true that the economic models were better where government run, we would see a lot more of those projects being successful.”

FCC SAYS TEST BROADBAND SPEED

The **FCC** is encouraging folks to download its Speed Test app, which is used to collect speed test data as part of the agency’s Measure Broadband America program. In addition to showing network performance test results for in-home and mobile broadband to the user, the app provides the test results to the FCC while protecting the privacy and confidentiality of program volunteers. “Expanding the base of consumers who use the FCC Speed Test app will enable us to provide improved coverage information to the public and add to the measurement tools we’re developing to show where broadband is truly available throughout the United States,” said acting chairwoman *Jessica Rosenworcel*.

VERIZON 5G + UNIVISION SOCCER

Programmers have been looking for ways to harness the power of 5G, and we’re starting to see the fruits. **Univision** and **Verizon** announced a multi-year partnership to deliver advanced 5G viewing experiences for the Liga MX. Through the partnership, Univision will exclusively launch the “TUDN Vision” content portal experience, where fans can portal through the stadium with 360 camera views and be brought closer to the action with players, spectators and more. Verizon will also work with Univision to virtualize and enhance production processes over 5G, and partner with Univision on an Enhanced Data Analytics feature.

STILL DARK

It’s been more than 100 days since **Mediacom** lost **Tegna** stations in a retransmission consent skirmish that continues to this day. Tegna stations, such as Moline, Illinois **ABC** affiliate WQAD, are warning viewers that they stand to miss out on the Oscars and NFL Draft later this month. Mediacom maintains the broadcaster is seeking a significant rate increase. The stations across 12 DMAs have been dark on Mediacom since Dec 31.

MORE BROADBAND BILLS

If you’re a member of Congress, chances are you have a broadband bill that attempts to close the digital divide. Among the latest entries is a measure from Reps *Antonio Delgado* (D-NY) and *David McKinley* (R-WA) that seeks to fix the broadband mapping problems

by allowing local governments, electric/telephone cooperatives, economic development/community groups, and small internet providers to access **USDA Rural Utility Service** grants that would allow them to collect information on local broadband coverage. The idea is to allow communities that are incorrectly designated by the **FCC** as having broadband access to have the information necessary to dispute that status with the FCC. Delgado also re-introduced The Broadband Speed Act, which would require ISPs to report annual, actual speed data to the FCC vs providing the speeds they are capable of providing. The bill would also require that new FCC funding awards be built out at speeds of 100Mbps or higher.

FORBES BILLIONAIRES

Jeff Bezos and *Elon Musk* took the top two spots, respectively, on Forbes’ World’s **Billionaire List**. *Rupert Murdoch* and family took the 71st spot with an estimated worth of \$23.5 billion. Other names making the list include **DISH** chair *Charlie Ergen* (#241 at \$9.6 billion), **Cox Enterprises** chair *Jim Kennedy* (#247 at \$9.4 billion), **Liberty’s** *John Malone* (#316 at \$7.8 billion), **Mediacom** CEO *Rocco Commisso* (#352 at \$7.2 billion), **AMC Networks/Madison Gardens’** *Chuck Dolan & family* (#440 at \$6.1 billion), **Netflix’s** *Reed Hastings* (#550, \$5.1 billion), cable pioneer *Amos Hostetter* (#775, \$3.8 billion) and **Comcast** CEO *Brian Roberts* (#1664, \$1.9 billion).

COMCAST OPEN-SOURCE PROJECTS ACCEPTED

Comcast announced Monday that *Kuberhealthy* and *Trickster*, two of its open-source projects, were accepted as sandbox projects by the Cloud Native Computing Foundation last month. Acceptance by the group signifies that the projects have both achieved a high level of technical maturity, global engagement and collaboration. *Kuberhealthy* was developed to help Comcast engineering teams better monitor Kubernetes clusters while *Trickster* is a tool designed to help make open-source alerting toolkit *Prometheus* run its dashboards smoother and faster.

PROGRAMMING

History Channel will commemorate the 20th anniversary of 9/11 with four two-hour documentaries. “Revealed: The Hunt for Bin Laden” premieres May 2 on the 10th anniversary of the raid that found *Osama bin Laden*. “9/11: Four Flights,” “Rise and Fall: The World Trade Center” and “9/11: From the Ground Up (wt)” will premiere Sept 10 and 11. – **Ovation TV** is hosting an Arts Advocacy Week programming block from 6am-8am ET this week to celebrate ‘Virtual’ Arts Advocacy Week. – **Epix** greenlit sci-fi horror series “From” for a 2022 premiere. The 10-ep series will also be available on **Netflix** outside the US. In other news, the eight-episode second season of “War of the Worlds” premieres on the network June 6 at 9pm.

PEOPLE

Fox News appointed *Bernard Gugiar* as general counsel and evp, corporate development. He joins from **Google**, where he was US head of industries for the company’s cloud deal pursuit organization. – *Charlyn Stanberry* joined the **NAB** as vp, government relations. Stanberry previously served as chief of staff for Rep *Yvette Clarke* (D-NY) and currently serves as an adjunct professor at the University of the District of Columbia.