

Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Sold to Comcast: Two Years After Dropping Video, BELD Calls it Quits

Something interesting is happening in Massachusetts. Two years after shutting down video service, **Braintree Electric Light Department** [BELD] customers are about to have the option to subscribe to a full suite of cable channels in a traditional linear package again. That's because the Massachusetts nonprofit, publicly owned power utility has sold its internet business to **Comcast**.

A Comcast spokesperson confirmed the transaction and said the operator will provide its full product offering in Braintree, including video, voice and business services. The utility shut down its video offering on Dec. 2, 2019, after months of warning its approximately 2100 video customers about the shift. On the day of the transition, GM *Bill Bottigii* told **CFX** that there were still about 660 customers who hadn't told BELD what they planned to do. He estimated about 40% of those subscribers would stay with BELD for broadband-only and switch to streaming. The rest likely ended up going to Comcast or **Verizon**, which BELD competes against.

In the end, it was a matter of economics, Bottigii told **CFX** Wednesday. "The system is 22 years old and fairly obsolete," he said. "We upgraded as best as we could and we reached the point where we'd have to make a major capital investment in HFC... We'd have to spend about \$5-\$7 million."

At one point, BELD had several thousand customers with Bottigii boasting that it was the first company to bring high-

speed internet to Braintree, followed by video and phone. But when Verizon came to town in 2007, the promotional discounts between Comcast and Fios ratcheted up and BELD began losing customers continuously. When the utility dropped video in 2019, its sub base dipped to around 2000, but it was able to scratch its way up to about 2500 broadband homes. However, that number has remained static. "We're pleased with the run we had. It's just at some point we felt it doesn't make sense for us to press on for 2500 customers," Bottigii said. "We've gotten some feedback obviously from some customers that are not happy we're getting out of the business. They all say we have the best customer service, but from a business perspective, it just doesn't make sense to invest all that money."

BELD's 2500 internet and phone customers will be transferred to Comcast, which has operated in Braintree for 18 years. The sales price wasn't disclosed, and the deal has no impact on BELD's electric business. Some BELD customers may be enticed to return to traditional video packages, but Bottigii doesn't think it's likely. His company spent considerable time teaching customers how to make the move to streaming, even hosting instructional demos in its lobby. Those customers are trained and likely won't want to return to the added expense of cable equipment, he said. Plus, Comcast offers free streaming device Flex to internet-only households.

BELD's switch from traditional video to internet streaming is interesting as other larger operators make similar moves. **GCI** is requiring all of its TV customers to migrate to its IPTV

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service Yukon TV by Dec. 31. Customers have to provide their own compatible streaming device, which includes Apple TV tvOS and iPads and iPhone with iOS 11.0 or higher, Amazon Fire Stick 4K, Android TV 5.0 and higher and Chromecast with Google TV. Roku streaming sticks are not currently listed as compatible, though the Alaska operator said it's continuously working on new deals. It's also not currently compatible with smart TVs or internet browsers. With the clock ticking on GCI's deadline to discontinue traditional cable service, it's offering two months of free service on Yukon TV.

In a separate M&A move, Comcast is acquiring **Russell Municipal Cable TV** in Western Massachusetts. It plans to transition customers to Xfinity and the Comcast Business suite of service through year-end. Town officials didn't return calls for comment by deadline. In a statement, Russell Cable manager *Randy Merritt* said: "We chose Comcast because it is the best operator in the business with the fastest and most reliable network. They are true innovators who continuously invest in their network to meet customers' current and future needs, and we are confident this sale will ensure our customers have access to Comcast's best-in-class network, products, services, and customer experience."

LAFCA ASKS FOR MORE COVID-19 PROTOCOLS

The **Los Angeles Film Critics Association** is asking distributors to implement industry-wide safety measures to protect its members in the upcoming awards season and beyond. In a statement, the association identified a number of inconsistent COVID-19 policies tied to in-person screenings and at-home digital or DVD screeners. For example, mask mandates vary event

by event and some distributors have become more restrictive in how they make their programming available now that in-person events are becoming more common. "Some of us continue to avoid screenings due to health issues that put us and/or our family members at higher risk from COVID, and are thus in need of screeners for review and awards consideration. Some of us have disabilities and were grateful to be provided convenient access to digital screeners shortly after theatrical screenings shut down," the association said. "Now that screenings are back, however, we often find that screener access has been taken away, and that requests for screeners are often denied with little consideration for our individual circumstances." The group has requested that distributors implement and enforce a number of practices for the duration of the pandemic to protect critics including requiring proof of vaccination or a recent negative COVID test for anyone in attendance at an in-person screening and providing screeners within a comparable time frame to accommodate high-risk or differently-abled journalists.

CABLELABS LEADS WIFI 6E TRIAL

CableLabs, **Intel** and the **Wireless Broadband Alliance** conducted a field trial highlighting the benefits of using low power indoor WiFi 6E for residential applications. The trial took place in a 3,600-square-foot two-story home and featured a range of tests on both the downlink and the uplink comparing throughput achieved on the 5GHz and 6GHz bands for wide channels. Comparisons were also made between the performance of WiFi 6E to WiFi 6 on the 5GHz band in the presence of overlapping neighboring access points. Key results include 1.7 TCP Gbps downlink and 1.2 TCP Gbps uplink speeds when

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using 160MHz channels on WiFi 6E in locations close to the access point with the larger channel bandwidth helping maximize both coverage and speed throughout the home.

FUBO TAPS EDISN.AI FOR INTERACTIVITY

fuboTV is doubling down on its vision for interactive live TV, closing its acquisition of **Edisn.ai** Thursday. The integration of Edisn.ai's computer vision technology into fubo's vMVPD platform and its FanView live statistics will result in better play-by-play identification and frame-accurate video-data synchronization. The provider will also examine using the technology to improve the accuracy of its electronic program guide and cloud DVR, enabling the ability to automatically detect when a live sporting event has ended or gone into overtime. Edison.ai CEO *Ashok Karanth* will join fuboTV as General Manager, fuboTV India as will the technology companies team of nearly two dozen data scientists and engineers.

WOW! UPPING SPEEDS IN MICHIGAN MARKETS

WOW! made 1 Gig HSD internet available to all residential and business customers in its mid-Michigan market. That includes its service areas in Lansing and Potterville. WOW!'s 1 Gig speeds are already available to nearly all of its customers across its 14 markets.

CARRIAGE

BNC struck a distribution agreement with **Cox Communications**. Cox Video customers will now be able to watch the network on Contour or by speaking "BNC" into their Contour Voice Remote. BNC already has carriage agreements with **Comcast, DirectTV, Charter, DISH, Verizon Fios** and more.

RATINGS

Hallmark Channel was Thanksgiving week's most-watched network across all cable for W18+ for the ninth consecutive year, thanks to original movie premieres that came as part of its Countdown to Christmas. For example, Nov 25's "The Nine Kittens of Christmas" averaged 2.7 million total viewers L+SD and 449,000 W25-54. Nov 27's "Christmas at Castle Hart" came in even higher, averaging 3.3 million total viewers. **Hallmark Movies & Mysteries** also scored high with the original movie premiere "Time for Them to Come Home for Christmas" garnering 1.6 million total viewers. – "Harry Potter: Hogwarts Tournament of Houses" debuted on Nov 28 to 3.1 million total viewers P2+ across **TBS** and **Cartoon Network**. The unscripted series is TBS's strongest original series premiere for P18-49 in nearly 4 years, reaching 918,000 viewers in the demo. It also scored as Cartoon Network's best series premiere with P18-49 this year with 299,000. Its next episode will air Dec 5 at 8pm and include a sneak peek at the **HBO Max** original "Harry Potter 20th Anniversary: Return to Hogwarts."

CALL FOR ENTRIES

The **WICT Network** is accepting applications for the Betsy Magness Leadership Institute Classes 46 and 47. Online applications must be submitted by 1pm ET on Feb 16. – **NAB** is accepting technical papers and panel proposals for the Broadcast Engineering and Information Technology track for

the 2022 **NAB Show**. The track, to be held April 24-26, is designed for broadcast engineers and technicians, distributors, IT professionals and others tied to the space. The deadline for proposals is January 14.

DOING GOOD

Comcast awarded a \$30,000 financial grant and donated 1,000 laptops to **SERJobs**, an organization in Texas that helps individuals from low-income communities with education training and financial empowerment services. The awards are part of a new partnership to fund technical skills training and readiness certifications for SerJobs' clients. The donation is part of Comcast's Internet Essentials program.

PROGRAMMING

AVOD **Fox Weather** will simulcast its live weekend programming on **Fox Business Network** starting Saturday. Every Saturday and Sunday, FBN viewers will be able to watch "America's Weather Weekend" live from 6-8am ET. Following the simulcasts, the show will continue live on Fox Weather from 8am-12pm ET. – **ESPN** struck a multi-year contract with sports betting analyst *Erin Dolan*. She'll be a regular on "Daily Wager" among other shows, and will make her on-air debut on the program Thursday. Dolan last served as on-air talent at **FanDuel** and **PointsBet**, creating sports betting content for their social channels and other programming. – **DOGTV** is finally crafting content for humans. The channel, which previously focused on programming for canines, will debut docuseries "Paws for Love" on Dec 9. DOGTV will donate \$1 per view of the show's first episode (up to \$5,000) to the Alliance of Therapy Dogs Junior Handler Program. The network plans to roll out new series for pet parents on a quarterly basis over the next year.

PEOPLE

Rogers Communications tapped *Robert Dépatie* to serve as President/COO of its newly-created Home & Business Division, effective Monday. The division will include connected home products, Rogers for Business and customer experience. He previously served in the same role at **Quebecor** and Quebecor Media and has spent four years on the Rogers' board. – **C2HR** is promoting *Parthavi Das* to Executive Director, effective Jan. 1. She'll take the reins from *Pamela Williams*, who retires on Dec. 31 after nearly two decades as the head of the HR group. Williams has been a leader in the cable and media world for 30 years and served as **WICT's** first full-time Executive Director. Das joined C2HR in Aug 2018, previously serving as the Chief of Staff at WICT. – **Scripps Networks** named *Cheryle Harrison* the head of **Bounce**. She's served in various roles at the network since its launch in 2011 as the first Katz network. Harrison, who will report to Scripps Networks President *Lisa Knutson*, spent time at **Turner Broadcasting** before joining the Bounce family. – *David Schager* joined **MSG Networks** as the company's SVP, Operations. He'll report to MSG Networks President/CEO *Andrea Greenberg* and oversee production, technical strategy and engineering for its networks. Schager has spent the last 13 years at **Discovery** as its Group SVP, Sports Content and Production, leading programming and production operations across the company's sports business.

PROGRAMMER'S PAGE

Disney Channel Screening Makes Our Nice List

We could fill a two-year journal with all the experiences COVID-19 has caused us to miss out on. Therefore, it's especially remarkable when something special actually emerges from the rubble. In-person screeners have largely been replaced by virtual, screen-at-your-own-leisure offerings. But **Disney Channel** has found a way to make the virtual screener a real event. I first experienced it around Halloween when I was invited to an online screening of the Disney Channel Original Movie "Under Wraps," a mummy-themed flick that is a remake of the first-ever DCOM. My 10-year-old couldn't believe we got to be on a Zoom call with the film's actors and they answered his questions. So when the invite came for Disney's upcoming Christmas film "Christmas Again?!", he started counting down the days. Disney helped fuel the excitement for the first new DCOM Christmas movie in 10 years by sending us hot cocoa, Christmas Again mugs, popcorn and a soft blanket that he won't let me touch. The film is sort of a kids' version of "Groundhog's Day" with 11-year-old Rowena (*Scarlett Estevez*) having to relive Christmas Day over and over again until she gets it right. As a mom who is guilty of picturing this perfect, unattainable Christmas in her head, I immediately sympathized with Ro when none of her sugar plum visions were playing out. The movie is sweet (my son gave it an "89 out of 10" rating), but the memory of playing trivia with him and the film's stars, seeing the excitement of the child actors' own families in the Zoom chat, and knowing my tween can brag to all his friends that he saw the film before any of them was even sweeter. For everyone besides Evan Maclean, Christmas Again!? Dec. 3 on Disney Channel. – *Amy Maclean*

REVIEWS

"Tell Me More," Week of Dec. 7 (check listings), **PBS**. Surely there's a place for the thoughtful, peaceful interviews author *Kelly Corrigan* conducts on this 27-minute series, whose Season 2 finale centers on *Ai-Jen Poo*, the Ivy League-educated woman who's dedicated her life to organizing and fighting for caregivers' rights. Co-founder and executive director of the National Domestic Workers Alliance, Poo has several maxims. One is that "a budget is a moral document." She means that an organization, or country, puts money behind its priorities and values. And money for domestic workers is one of the centerpieces of her work. The people who care for our children, the elderly and disabled should earn a living wage, she contends. One of the best things about this short show is how much Corrigan adds to the dialogue. Recalling a moment in a hospice watching a relative pass, she realizes that everyone will experience death. The elderly, she says, are "you, tomorrow." – "Outbreak," streaming from Dec. 1, **Crackle**. No doubt, green lighting this Canadian series (in French, with subtitles) about a virus epidemic in Montreal was a bold move at this moment. Even worse (or better, depending on your view), the virus might have escaped from a lab. For those who want an escape via television, turn away. Everyone else, though, will enjoy the stories of seemingly unrelated people in this gripping 10 parter. – *Seth Arenstein*

BASIC CABLE		
P2+ PRIME RANKINGS*		
(11/22/21-11/28/21)		
MON-SUN	MC	MC
	US	US AA
	AA%	(000)
ESPN	0.892	2,780
FNC	0.676	2,106
HALL	0.588	1,831
PARA	0.292	910
HGTV	0.283	881
TBSC	0.265	825
MSNBC	0.263	820
TLC	0.250	778
FOOD	0.249	776
HMM	0.235	732
INSP	0.223	693
USA	0.214	667
HIST	0.214	666
LIFE	0.214	666
TNT	0.199	620
DISC	0.199	619
ID	0.179	559
CNN	0.169	527
FRFM	0.165	514
ESPN2	0.161	500
TVLAND	0.158	493
BET	0.154	481
A&E	0.149	465
FX	0.145	452
AMC	0.129	402
WETV	0.125	389
NATGEO	0.124	386
BRAVO	0.122	381
FS1	0.117	363
GSN	0.116	361
NICK	0.110	343
APL	0.104	325
OXYGEN	0.104	323
NAN	0.103	321

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



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