

# Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

## Second Chance: Black News Channel Officially Headed to Byron Allen

**Entertainment Studios Networks** is officially the successful bidder for **Black News Channel**, setting it up to be the future home for the network.

The bidding deadline for the \$11 million in assets was set by the U.S. Bankruptcy Court for the Northern District of Florida was July 11 at 5pm ET. The court received no qualified bids during the period outside of the one already received from ESN. With that, it canceled the auction previously scheduled for Tuesday and is moving ahead with actions to officially approve the buy.

ESN did have some competition for the network with **Ebony Studios** also actively pursuing a purchase of the assets, but the latter wasn't able to finalize an agreement before its limited exclusivity period expired on June 3. The acquisition will add 300 million linear and digital subscribers to the **Allen Media** family thanks to Black News Channel's carriage on traditional linear packages through the likes of **Comcast, Charter, Cox** and **Verizon** as well as on platforms like **Roku**. Founder/CEO **Byron Allen** told **Cablefax** that the cable industry "dropped the ball" when it comes to Black News Channel, claiming the network went into bankruptcy because operators didn't want to pay sub fees.

"If you really want something to succeed and you don't want to find it in bankruptcy, and they're pink slipping 300 Black journalists. Yeah, there should have been some sub fees,"

he said. "This is the reason I sued the cable industry before for \$40 billion. Are you serious? You're going to pay anywhere from \$1-2 for other cable networks, but zero for the Black News Channel?"

Allen said the advertising community also failed to give Black News Channel the love it needed to maintain or grow its operations. Looking at non-direct response advertising, he said ad dollars were less than \$2 million for an entire year. His goal now is to reinvest in and reposition the Black News Channel in order to get it the support he believes it deserved the first time around.

"It's a bad mark on us as a country that the Black News Channel didn't get enough support, to have diversity in ownership, diversity in voices and diversity of viewpoints," he said. "Alright cable industry, you've got one more chance at that. Alright ad community, you've got one more chance at that. So we're going to work closely with folks to let them show the world who they really are."

There are still some final hoops to jump through before ESN acquires the assets. Non-Debtor Counterparties to Designated Contracts had a chance to file objections tied to ESN's bid through 5pm ET on Thursday. A hearing to consider court approval of the transaction to ESN is scheduled to kick off on Tuesday at 10am ET before Chief Judge **Karen Specie**. After that, it's full steam ahead on revival efforts for Black News Channel.

"There isn't a bank in the world where we can deposit the



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words. We have to do it with real economic inclusion and sponsorships. We've made the investment. We're buying it, we have the infrastructure," Allen said. "We just need the industry now to say 'You know what? That wasn't our intent. Let us get in here and really do the right thing because we're better than that.'"

**SIMINGTON QUESTIONS FCC RELIANCE ON NIELSEN**

**Nielsen** has faced its share of questions about accuracy over the years from networks, the **VAB** and now an **FCC** commissioner. When the FCC unanimously adopted an item Thursday to update rules regarding what Nielsen data is used to determine broadcasters' local DMA, FCC Commissioner *Nathan Simington* jumped on the item to ask just how much the agency should be relying on Nielsen. He counts 23 different rules that use Nielsen in some way, which he said might lead the public to believe the FCC routinely canvases the industry for alternative data providers and has good reason to rely solely on Nielsen. "There's an obvious reason why we don't do this at the FCC, though. For most Commission purposes, there is no one else in the industry. Nielsen is the only game in town," Simington said. "That's not necessarily a bad thing, but as we've all learned from the supply chain crises during the pandemic, it's worth looking at bottlenecks, choke points and single points of failure." He noted that **The Media Ratings Council** de-accredited Nielsen last year. While he said he's confident Nielsen will correct defects in its methodology to regain accreditation, he asked whether the FCC should be encouraging an alternative and whether it should be relying on data from a presently unaccredited source. He wants the agency to open a Notice of Inquiry related to Nielsen's inclusion in other FCC rules.

The Notice of Proposed Rulemaking approved Thursday relates to FCC rules that require local TV stations seeking carriage on a pay TV system to determine their local market by using the Nielsen annual Station Index Directory in combination with the Nielsen Station Index United States Television Household Estimates. The problem is those publications are no longer being produced. So, the FCC is proposing replacing them with Nielsen's monthly Local TV Station Information Report. Simington wants more. "If there are opportunities to identify or generate new sources of broadcast data, we should take them. If there are improvements to be made in our usage of broadcast data, we should make them," he said. "And if our ties to Nielsen ultimately represent a structural impediment to the public interest, necessity, and convenience—we should break them."

**ALTICE USA RAISES SPEED FOR ACP**

**Altice USA** subsidiaries **Optimum** and **Suddenlink** are allowing households that enroll in the Affordable Connectivity Program to receive 300 Mbps internet service at no cost after the \$30 credit is applied. The plan includes equipment and fees, but the credit can still be used on other internet plans. The providers previously offered 100 Mbps service for free to eligible customers.

**FIBER FRENZY**

**Bluepeak** is expanding its FTTH network to St. Joseph, Missouri. The provider signed a franchise agreement with the state to begin building its initial \$36 million project that'll bring service to nearly 36,000 homes and businesses. Bluepeak offers a minimum tier of 1 Gbps for \$50/month, with residential plans reaching up to 5 Gbps and businesses up to 10 Gbps.

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**SHARK WEEK NFTS**

**Discovery Channel** and NFT platform **Nifty** are bringing two NFT programs to life for Shark Week. From Wednesday through July 31, viewers can purchase digital collectibles or claim free. NFTs for watching Shark Week's programming. Five NFTs will be available to purchase and at 9pm each night, a QR code will pop up and lead the viewer to that night's free NFT.

**MICROSOFT DIVES DEEP ON DIGITAL EQUITY**

**Microsoft** [released](#) what it calls the Digital Equity Data Dashboard Thursday in an effort to help lawmakers and stakeholders better understand economic opportunity gaps. The tool, developed by the company's Chief Data Science Officer *Juan Lavista Ferres* and the Microsoft AI for Good Lab, brings together data from the **Census Bureau**, **FCC**, **BroadbandNow** and Microsoft's own broadband usage data and examines 20 indicators of digital equity. Those include broadband access, usage, education and poverty rates.

**ACP AHEAD AT THE FCC**

It's Thursday, and **FCC** Chair *Jessica Rosenworcel* figures she's already seen **NTIA** head *Alan Davidson* at least twice and spoken to him on the phone at least once this week. "There is more engagement between our agencies than ever before. That includes updating our spectrum practices," she said Thursday during the first FCC in-person press conference in more than two years (pressers were previously held over the phone due to COVID). "We're also making sure that they are in the know about where we stand with [broadband] mapping." Broadband providers can file information about service areas through Sept. 1, then the agency will assess the data and open it up for challenges. Rosenworcel was asked if she was concerned the recent [Supreme Court ruling](#) in West Virginia vs. EPA would weaken the Commission's authority. "We're taking a look at that ruling, as we are an administrative agency, but I have confidence that we have broad authority under the Communications Act," she said. The plan is for next month's FCC meeting to also be in person, with Rosenworcel teeing up items on the Affordable Connectivity Program. The four commissioners are set to vote on establishing a multi-million-dollar Outreach Grant Program that would enlist partners to inform people in their communities about the ACP's benefits, eligibility requirements and how to apply. The FCC also will vote on establishing a one-year pilot program aimed at increasing awareness of the ACP among federal housing assistance recipients, an initiative led by Commissioner *Geoffrey Starks*.

**VERIZON EXTENDS 5G ULTRA WIDEBAND**

**Verizon** expanded its 5G Ultra Wideband service to more than 1 million additional customers in the Atlanta area. The service now covers the cities of Loganville, Lawrenceville, Kennesaw, McDonough, Hiram and Milton. It will also reach portions of southwestern Forsyth County, Fulton County, western Clayton County, southeastern Cherokee County and Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport. Customers can get download speeds up to 10x faster than median Verizon 4G LTE speeds.

**SLING TO SPONSOR TBT**

**Sling** is partnering with The Basketball Tournament, a two-week event starting Saturday on **ESPN** with a \$1 million winner-take-all prize. The service will be featured as an official sponsor throughout the tourney, and the game-winning shot will be dubbed the "SLING Shot" for every matchup.

**HONORS**

**NBCUniversal** Chairman of Global Advertising & Partnerships *Linda Yaccarino* was named one of the 2022 She Runs It Women of the Year. The program honors women in marketing, media and tech that have achieved business success while also being socially responsible. The in-person celebration will take place in New York City on September 28. **American Express** CMO *Elizabeth Rutledge* and **Coca-Cola** Chief Communications, Sustainability and Strategic Partnerships Officer *Bea Perez* are also being honored.

**PROGRAMMING**

**Apple TV+** is releasing a docuseries called "Gutsy" on Sept. 9. It follows *Hillary* and *Chelsea Clinton* as they highlight the women who inspire them. – All seven matches of The Women's Cup will stream on **Paramount+**. The competition begins August 14 at 4pm as AC Milan vs. Tokyo Verdy Beleza square off, followed by Tottenham vs. Club América at 7pm. The semifinals will take place August 17 at 5pm and 8pm before the championship match on August 20 at 7pm. – **FX** ordered "The Bear" for a second season. Season 1 debuted June 23 and is available on **Hulu**. – **History Channel** is expanding "Alone" into two new series. "Alone: The Skills Challenge" will premiere August 4 at 10:30pm and "Alone: Frozen" will debut August 11 at 9pm. – **Tubi** original film "Eradication" will premiere Friday. – "Mecum Harrisburg 2022" will air on **MotorTrend TV** and **MotorTrend+** on July 28-30 from 6pm-midnight each night. The auction includes the 1998 Volvo V70 Wagon from **AMC's** "Breaking Bad" and "Better Call Saul." – **AMC Network's** Shudder and **IFC Midnight** unveiled a theatrical run for "Saloum" starting Sept. 2 before the film's streaming debut on Sept. 8.

**DOING GOOD**

**GCI** donated \$20,000 to the Bristol Bay Native Corporation Education Foundation in Alaska to assist in providing higher education and vocational training to BBNC shareholders. Last year, the foundation created a new program that provides career-focused vocational education scholarships to students.

**PEOPLE**

**FreeWheel** named *Katy Loria* as U.S. Chief Revenue Officer, *Michael Lawlor* as Chief Operations and Service Officer and *Chris Rouser* as Head of HR. Loria will manage the buy and sell sides of the company's marketplace as well as maintain revenue strategy by integrating revenue streams and new programs. Lawlor will centralize advertising and service operations and Rouser will help lead FreeWheel's HR partners. – **Verizon** SVP, Public Sector *Maggie Hallbach* was named to the Northern Virginia Technology Council. Hallbach oversees Verizon's team that partners with federal, state, local, education and public safety customers to bring its services.

