

# Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

## Flex Assignment: Indy Show Ops Aren't Afraid to Try Something New

When it comes to thriving as a broadband and cable operator today, it often means throwing out the rulebook and meeting customers—and employees—where there are. Whether that means work-from-home or SMS messaging for service problems, operators need to be flexible.

Through it all, communication is key. During a panel at **NCTC** and **ACA Connects' Independent Show** in Orlando Monday, **Buckeye Broadband** President *Geoff Shook* talked about how the company has learned over the years that allowing a cable modem reboot or equipment upgrade to happen unannounced torpedoes the customer experience. "There's a razor's edge there between too much communication and not enough," he said.

And operators need to consider how they are conveying messaging. "Sometimes we communicate in the way we like to be communicated with, and we've got to make sure that we know all those ways that our customers like to receive communication from us," noted **Conway Corp.** CMO *Crystal Kemp*.

Truck rolls are a great example. "A lot of people assume techs are customer service, so we've addressed that problem. Go ahead and ask them about the other services we offer—from wireless to video. Is everything OK?" said *Jackson Energy Authority Telecom Division SVP Ben Lovins*. "We want everything taken care of."

Of course, hiring and retaining employees today presents its

own challenges. "And we're not even just worried about our employees. What about contractors as well?" said **Schurz Communications** CTO *Tom Williams*. "It's even hard to make sure that there's enough work for the contractors in order to stay engaged because they then go to the next highest bidder... You have to have not just three months of worth, but you've got to have several years worth of work. And due to supply chain issues, now you've got to have all the equipment on order for one to two, maybe even three years in advance."

With government money coming in for broadband deployments, there's even more to worry about in terms of workforce. **NCTC** CEO *Lou Borrelli* said the co-op has had dealing with two different firms that were created to train and develop contracting teams to handle the expected construction boon. "We can regionalize some of these build activities because we do have a large number of smaller members that are geographically close enough where we could set these guys up and basically have them facilitate various projects if the timing works," he said. "That's something we're looking at because... as you know, the guys that can write the biggest checks will get the most attention to begin with. We need to figure out how to do that on a more regional scale or a national scale if we're able to."

The panel agreed that remote work, accelerated by the pandemic, is here to stay, but they don't want hybrid work to mean there's a loss of community among employees. "We had events prior to COVID where we would get 90-95% participation, whether it was a food truck or a Christmas party or whatever

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it may be. Now we throw up a food truck, and you're getting 40% participation—and 39% of it is technicians because they'll always eat. I just don't know how we get it back," said Williams.

Buckeye Broadband is looking at amending the sense of community within the workforce. And it's going down some pretty non-traditional avenues, planning events such as bring your child to work after hours to introduce families to one other. Bring your dog to work has been especially well received, Shook said. "I don't think we can just do the things we used to do three years ago. So we're out there spit-balling different things that we can do to try to create the recreate the sense of community," he said.

Kemp added that it's important to make sure employees are part of these conversations. "We are very focused on thinking about how our customers want to receive information, but do we sometimes think that our employees think the way that we think? Are we really engaging with them to see how they want to receive information?" she asked. "What are the things that they value in employment? Do they value the 401K like we value a 401K? Or would they rather you pay more of their insurance?"

**NEW DAWN FOR NCTC**

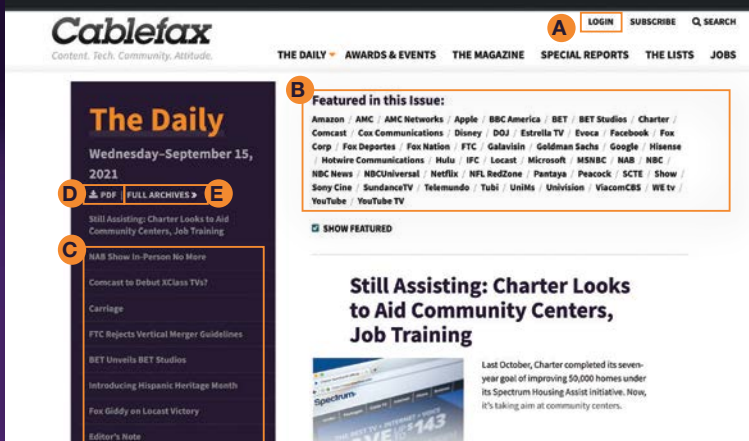
The kickoff of the 17th **Independent Show** Monday also served as the debut of **NCTC's** new name. The non-profit co-op is keeping the initials but switching from the National Cable Television Cooperative to the **National Content & Technology Cooperative**—a moniker that's much more fitting giving the organization's mission to help connect members to broadband and technology tools along with negotiating programming deals. "Fundamentally the relationship that we have as a co-op with our members has changed. We've

had a fairly passive relationship under the way that the co-op was formed originally with buying programming. We negotiate deals, you launch channels and then we wait until the renewal," NCTC CEO *Lou Borrelli* said at Monday's opening session. "Our path going forward requires all of us to be more active and engaged... This is not a passive relationship anymore. It can't be because of what's happening in Washington with the money that's going to be flowing in, what's happening with technology and direct to consumer. We all have to be in this together active and involved. If not, it puts our sustainable future at risk." Along with the new name comes a new logo, emblazoned on T-shirts, pens and other tchotchkes at the show, as well as the introduction of the tagline, "Stronger Together." That's a message Borrelli's been preaching since he joined the organization 14 months ago and launched new programs such as the Connectivity Exchange, which allows its 700 member operators to compete for and win bids to provide broadband network services to national brands or large-scale RFPs through a fully automated platform from quote to order with unified billing and support. NCTC also announced at the show it's finalizing a set of partner agreements to deliver MVNO cellular service to member companies. The expectation is that members will be ready to add mobile to their bundles by 4Q22. NCTC members who participate as an MVNO will have flexibility in the software and hardware they use. The idea is to incorporate pacts with multiple suppliers into one program to deliver branded billing, tiered bundle discounts and mobile device sales.

**NFL+ IS HERE**

There's a new sports streamer in town. The **NFL's** DTC service **NFL+** celebrated its launch Monday as it replaces NFL Game

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Pass. The service is available through the NFL app and comes in two tiers: standard for \$4.99/month or \$39.99/year and NFL+ Premium for \$9.99/month or \$79.99/year. The regular offering allows fans to watch local primetime regular season and postseason games, NFL Films archives, live game audio for every game and more. NFL+ Premium includes condensed and full-game replays without ads, as well as coaches' films with an All-22 camera view of games. NFL+ won't have exclusive regular-season games, but according to **CNBC** that could come in the future. The service's launch marks another chapter in professional sports leagues and broadcasters finding ways to expand distribution to fans, as seen with RSN apps **Bally Sports+** and **NESN 360**, which have had [mixed reviews](#) so far. But for the NFL, the league is also still in the process of choosing a new partner for [Sunday Ticket](#), with **Apple** and **Amazon** as the rumored frontrunners.

### JUST RELEASED: TOP OPS MAGAZINE

**Breezeline** was named **Cablefax: The Magazine's** MSO of the Year in recognition of a year that included transformative acquisitions, strategic overbuilds, new products and a new customer experience initiative. **Armstrong Utilities** is the 2022 Independent Operator of the Year in honor of its leadership in 10G and bringing broadband to rural America. Both companies are highlighted in the just-released [Top Ops issue](#), which also features Change Initiative of the Year winner **Comcast**, Community Builder **Cable One** and Financial Executive of the Year *John Rego* of **WOW!** **Charter** and **WOW!** took home the Digital Equity Awards for their work to bridge the digital divide. Outgoing **ACA Connects** CEO *Matt Polka* received the first-ever Founders Circle Award, while ex **MCTV** President *Bob Gessner* and former **CTAM** CEO **Char Beales** earned Lifetime Achievement honors. Be sure to check out all the Top Ops profiles as well as the first-ever class of **Regional Rainmakers**.

### REMOTE WORK OPENS LEGAL CAN OF WORMS

Remote and hybrid work opportunities may make life easier for employees, but it often creates more headaches for employers when it comes to avoiding legal issues. **GCI** is remote-first, meaning every position has been reviewed and a determination has been made about whether or not that job could be done remotely. Now, 75% of the company is now full-time remote, and that's permanent. But that doesn't mean that every location across the U.S. is remote-eligible, and that usually comes down to challenges with local and state legislation. "We do not allow our employees to go to Hawaii. They have some healthcare regulations that are very difficult to meet if you're a foreign employer," **GCI** VP, Legal and Regulatory/Deputy General Counsel *David Hymas* said. "New York, New Jersey [are also banned]... We just put Wyoming, at least temporarily, on our list because we are self-funded for our workers' comp, and Wyoming would not accept our certifications." Certain cities have also made it on the banned list due to their unique employment laws, including San Francisco. With the shift to distributed workforces, operators have also been trying to find solutions that ensure those remote workers could open the door for data breaches or other cybersecurity issues. "We went from a world where you might have had to show a badge and go in to work off of the desktop. Now, people are taking computers home,

they're able to access databases that are no longer wrapped behind necessarily that firewall," **Cinnamon Mueller** Managing Partner *Bruce Beard* said. "It's kind of a whole new world we're dealing with." He suggested looking at options like VPNs and two-factor authentication as a start to building up defenses. **GCI** goes one step further by sending employees a laptop that's encrypted right down to the USB ports. **Armstrong Group** Deputy General Counsel *Kathryn Pruss Zeltwanger* and **Breezeline** Deputy General Counsel *Thomas Gunerman* said if an employee reports a lost phone or computer, they immediately track it and brick it to prevent any leaks. What makes things even more challenging is the ever-changing state of data privacy legislation, and the patchwork of regulation that has been borne out of state governments taking matters into their own hands. **Breezeline** has also been more proactive than ever about tracking pending changes to state privacy laws across its footprint, increasing its communications with **NECTA** and **ACA Connects** on those issues. It has also looked into using software that tracks bills in various states. "It's certainly something we've been trying to do to keep ahead of things so we can get a little more runway in terms of compliance or an opportunity to challenge it," *Gunerman* said.

### T-MOBILE AGREES TO DATA BREACH SETTLEMENT

**T-Mobile** has agreed to a \$350 million settlement for a 2021 data breach that impacted 76.6 million U.S. residents, according to a Missouri court filing released Friday. The mobile operator put out a statement outlining its work to enhance its existing cybersecurity efforts and introduce new defenses. Those include the creation of a Cybersecurity Transformation Office and conducting nearly 900,000 training courses for employees and partners.

### INDY SHOW NOTEBOOK

**ACA Connects** members re-elected **BOYCOM Vision** President/CEO *Patricia Jo Boyers* to a new two-year term as chairman. **Cable One** COO *Mike Bowker* was re-elected to a two-year term as vice chair. The **ACA Connects** members also voted to extend the terms of five incumbent **ACAC** board directors: **Breezeline's** *Leslie Brown*, **Liberty Puerto Rico's** *Carla Framil-Ferran*, **Shentel's** *Ed McKay*, **TDS'** *Drew Petersen* and **Service Electric Cablevision's** *Bob Wieand*.

### PROGRAMMING

After a seven-season run, **TBS'** "Full Frontal with Samantha Bee" has been canceled. This follows "Chad" and "The Big D" being axed by the **Warner Bros Discovery** as it evaluates its programming lineup. – **Curiosity** is bringing the educational streaming platform **Da Vinci Kids** to its Smart Bundle later this summer. **Da Vinci Kids** comes with original shows and interactive learning experiences and joins **Tastemade**, **Topic**, **SOMM TV**, **One Day University** and **Nebula** in the bundle. Full access to the bundle is \$69.99/year.

### PEOPLE

Former **Starz** PR hand *Michelle Portillo* has landed at **Cable One**, where she'll serve as Director of Corporate Communications. She spent nearly eight years at **Starz** and was active in the **Media + Tech Collective of the Rockies** (formerly the Rocky Mountain Cable Association).



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