

Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

NAMIC Day 2: DEI Still Very Much a Work in Progress

There's been a trend of pent-up demand for conferences and events in the wake of COVID-19 cancellations, and **NAMIC's** 36th Annual Conference is more evidence of the adage 'if you host it, they will come.' The association's two-day gathering, which wrapped Wednesday afternoon, had a record 200 new attendees. Overall, the conference increased by about 39% from 2019, counting both virtual and in-person attendees, according to organizers.

ESPN had a major presence at the event, with Chairman *Jimmy Pitaro* joining a morning session on the power of diverse storytelling through sports. "What we don't want to see at ESPN is a conference room filled with people that look like me. When I walk by conference rooms, I want to see diversity. I want to see the huddle. I want to see folks that can give various perspectives as we're evaluating all these opportunities," he said "We're getting there; we've made progress. We still have work to do, but we do take a lot of pride in our focus, our ability to tell these stories that are connected to sports, but they're looked at through a social lens, through a cultural lens, through a political lens when it's connected to sports."

The panel included award-winning filmmakers *Michèle Stephenson* and *Joe Brewster* who have the upcoming short film "Black Girls Play" coming to ESPN as well as *Shima Olliaee* whose upcoming ESPN 30 for 30 podcast "Pink Card" follows the lives of the latest generation of women in a 40-year underground movement who fight to watch a soccer game in

Iran. "We are actually just happy to be the platform through which you can tell [these stories]," said Pitaro. "Stories like the Chicago Bulls dynasty, 'The Last Dance' are incredibly important. Those are right down the middle, high quality programming. We take a lot of pride in that. Equally important are the stories that are beyond just down-the-middle stick and ball stories... Ratings are important, of course. We're all in the business world, but there are other things that are important too. And by the way, when we can get both, fantastic."

Later in the day, execs turned the conversation to how companies can use DEI strategies to attract and retain talent. While most left jobs during the Great Resignation in search of more money, many wanted greater fulfillment and a sense of belonging. "Companies, similar to **Google**, are taking a stance to really put belonging and inclusion at the heart of their DEI strategy," said *Jessica Guerrero*, Global Head of Cloud GTM Diversity, Equity and Inclusion for Google. "It's not fully about representation. That's just the beginning. Part of the issue is really how can we cultivate an environment where everyone no matter, their identities, their circumstances, their issues, their skill sets or backgrounds can belong?"

One way Google is trying to keep employees happy is through 20% projects, which allow Googlers (with managerial approval) to participate on a 20% basis in another project not in their direct wheelhouse. "Google, in its origin, had this mindset that if you were good enough to work at Google, then you are probably good enough to deal with multiple roles," Guerrero said. "Even our



Congratulations to all the Honorees!

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hiring process is designed in that way where your role-related knowledge or your ability to do the role that you're currently being considered for is one attribute and not the most important attribute in our hiring process because we very much believe in the rescaling, the upskilling and repurposing."

NBCUniversal VP of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion *Salvador Mendoza* recommended companies look at their leadership development program process. Often those programs are on a nomination basis, which can put a manager in an awkward position if an employee needs to elevate their work. "I always will push for self-nomination, regardless of whatever leadership development program you have in whatever level," he said. "It offers transparency, it offers an opportunity for employees to raise their hand, it offers an opportunity for your employees to feel that they're counted. It offers an opportunity for everybody to say I have a chance to do that. And guess what? If I suck at my job, then somebody has to tell me that I don't belong in that program."

Madison Square Garden Company Chief Diversity Officer and Talent Management *Demetrius Thornton* noted that diversity often drops off at the director level and beyond. One way his company is combating that is replacing the annual review with quarterly reviews. "So every single quarter, you're talking to your teams, about their careers, and what is happening and what they can do," he said. "In addition to that, if you don't know how to have a conversation with your employees about their careers, we will give you a template... so that by the end of the year, we know what this employee is and we know what their aspirations are."

VERIZON, NEXSTAR BATTLE OVER RETRANS

Verizon is warning customers that **Nexstar** stations could go dark on **Fios** on Friday absent a new retransmission consent deal. Verizon began warning customers of a potential blackout on Tuesday, claiming the broadcaster has proposed an "immediate and unacceptable" rate increase of almost 64% to carry its stations. "For nearly two decades, broadcasters like Nexstar have been charging cable and satellite providers—and their customers—unreasonably high fees to access local stations," Verizon said. "It's time for our leaders at the **FCC** and in Congress to protect consumers by holding them—and other broadcasters who frequently use this tactic—accountable." Should the two fail to reach a deal, 15 stations across the East Coast and access to **NewsNation** could be disrupted. A number of those stations lie in key urban markets, including Philly and D.C. Nexstar is fighting back against Verizon's claims, arguing that it is only putting forth offers that fairly value its programming. "Nexstar is simply seeking fair market rates for the live sports, local news, and high-quality entertainment programming we provide to millions of viewers across the country," EVP/Chief Communications Officer *Gary Weitman* said in a statement. "We have a long track record

The WHO and the WHY

CFX's spotlight on recent new hires & promotions



ALICE Rao
SVP OF PUBLICITY
HALLMARK MEDIA

3 THINGS TO KNOW

- Alice joins the Hallmark Media team after working as a publicity and communications consultant with Netflix, HBO Max, Turner Networks and MRC Media. She's been involved in series such as "Stranger Things" and "Emily in Paris." In her new role, she'll oversee publicity campaigns promoting networks and services, programming, talent and more, and will also be a liaison with corporate communications, talent relations and events and programming to give guidance.
- She's passionate about representation and giving young kids the opportunity to have someone to look up to. "Growing up, I didn't see anyone who looked like me in entertainment," she told Cablefax. "It's super powerful for young people to see themselves reflected in others and know what's possible. I'm glad times are changing and entertainment is becoming more representative of what our world looks like."
- Alice hasn't only climbed up the publicity ranks in the industry—she's made the 11-day journey up the Himalayas to Everest Base Camp, calling it "an incredible adventure." She's also ran the Joshua Tree half marathon "at night in the freezing cold." Though she's no fan of running, Alice is proud to say she completed the marathon but isn't planning on taking it on a second time. In the future, Alice might be found hiking in Patagonia, seeing the Northern Lights or trying the cheesy biscuits at Red Lobster.

of negotiating fairly and avoiding service interruptions in our markets and we hope to reach agreement with Verizon Fios." Retrans reform organization **American Television Alliance** sent an email to key policymakers on Capitol Hill Wednesday in an attempt to show a pattern of bad behavior from Nexstar. Executive Director *Mike Chappell* described Nexstar's 2019 dispute with **AT&T** and **DirecTV**, a 23-day blackout on **DISH** in 2020 that took away viewer access to 164 local television stations and **Comcast's** accusations that Nexstar [violated](#) the FCC's ownership rules. "When Nexstar bought **Tribune** in 2019, it told the FCC—at great length—that it would improve local service and news, thereby serving the public interest. Since then, it has shown nothing but contempt for the viewers it claims to serve," Chappell wrote. "Enough is enough. It is time for Congress and the FCC to step in."

WBD REHOUSING TELEVISION WORKSHOPS

After reports that **Warner Bros. Discovery** was closing digital short-form programming division **Stage 13** and the **Warner Brothers Television Workshop**, the company spoke out to clarify the future of its workshop and talent pipeline programs. News of plans to shutter the programs for diverse voices resulted in the **Directors Guild of America** announcing that it “will not stand idly by while WB/Discovery seeks to roll back decades of advancement for women and Directors of color,” noting that the program is mandated by the DGA collective bargaining agreement. “We have been in contact with WB and have received their commitment to work with us to remedy this important matter. We will do everything in our power to make sure they do so,” DGA said. Late Wednesday, WBD announced that the Writers Workshop and Directors Workshop will be housed within the company’s Diversity, Equity and Inclusion unit following the completion of the 2022-23 WDTV Writers Workshop class. They’ll both live in the existing Pipeline Programs division led by Warner Bros. Discovery DEI VP *Grace Moss*. Warner Bros. Television will still be a partner of the program and studio leadership will work closely with the Pipeline Programs group to ensure cohorts have access to as many resources as possible. The original workshops weren’t developed with a specific DEI focus in mind, but they will be crafted through that lens moving forward.

CAVANAGH NOW COMCAST PRESIDENT

Comcast Corp. is elevating *Mike Cavanagh* to President, making him the third to hold the title in the company’s 59-year history. He will retain his CFO responsibilities, but work even closer with Chair/CEO *Brian Roberts* to manage Comcast’s businesses and teams. Cavanagh joined Comcast seven years ago after more than two decades in the financial services industry. “Today’s promotion will come as no surprise—Mike is admired and trusted by those who know and work with him,” said Roberts in a statement. “He’s an outstanding partner and together we are focused on continuing to create new and exciting opportunities for growth.”

CABLE ENERGY COMMITMENT PAYING OFF

The cable industry’s commitment to cutting energy costs continues to pay off for the industry and consumers. Thanks to a nine-year-long agreement between pay TV providers and energy efficiency advocates led by the **Consumer Technology Association, NCTA** and **CableLabs**, the aggregate energy use of set-top boxes has been cut by 57% in the U.S. The primary commitment of the deal establishes that 90% of each service provider’s new set-top purchases annually meet prescribed energy efficiency levels that are revisited every three years. Consumers saved \$2.5 billion in annual energy costs in 2021 as a result of the efforts. A massive driver of savings under the program is a transition from traditional DVRs with hard drives to non-DVR internet protocol devices that are far more energy efficient since last year.

NAMIC LUNCHEON A SEND OFF FOR HENDRICKS

The **NAMIC** Annual Awards Luncheon is always a joyous affair, but this year’s affair quickly became a celebration of life for one of the organization’s Next Generation Leaders Award honorees. Fellow honorees **ESPN** SVP, Programming and Scheduling *Freddy Rolón*

and **NBCU** SVP, Digital Products and Operations *Monica Williams* dedicated parts of their acceptance speeches to *James Hendricks*, **Spectrum Reach**’s Group VP, HR and Administration. He passed away unexpectedly in September in an accidental drowning off the coast of New Jersey. “He was actually one of the first few people to congratulate me on the award, and we had a plan to celebrate today,” Rolón said. *David Kline*, **Charter** EVP and Spectrum Reach President, was on hand to accept the award on behalf of Hendricks. He described how he and a group of Charter employees traveled to attend the funeral. “Of course, we were sad to say goodbye to James, but the service attended by his family, friends, over 100 fraternity brothers from Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity and the Bobby Lewis Ensemble from a New York Baptist Church, which he was very involved with here in Harlem, turned out to be a celebration of his life,” he said. “After only being with Spectrum Reach for two years, most of us only knew him professionally. It was truly wonderful to see a side of him many of us didn’t know.” In honor of Hendricks, Charter has created an annual award that will bear his name and recognize an employee who exemplifies integrity, tenacity, collaboration and intelligence. **Cox** EVP/Chief People Officer *Kia Painter* dedicated the award to her mother for believing in her and pushing her to succeed from an early age. “Long before I heard Black girls rocked, long before I heard that we actually have a little bit of magic, my mama told me Black girls soar,” Painter said. “She said whenever you are in doubt, because sometimes it happens, put on your best outfit, put your jetpack on with all your turbo boosters and you soar and go get those dreams.” NAMIC New York President *Rahdiah Barnes*, NAMIC Southern California President *Danielle Green* and NAMIC Detroit President *Maria Holmes* were honored with this year’s Chapter Leader Awards for going above and beyond the call of duty to provide high-quality programming. Taking home the inaugural Diversity in Technology Award was **Comcast Cable** SVP, Emerging Technology and Services *Franklyn Athias*.

MAKE IT SIMPLE

The consumer and enterprise platform **MyBundle.TV** and **NCTC** entered an agreement that lets its members utilize tools to streamline streaming services. MyBundle.TV’s platform tools let viewers find subscriptions, watch live TV and other content and can work hand-in-hand with NCTC’s members’ offerings or on its own as a broadband solution.

CARRIAGE

The environmental sustainability network **EarthxTV** is entering the broadcast cable sphere. It agreed to distribution deals with **Charter** and **NCTC** in the U.S. and with **Sky** and **Freeview** in the U.K. Charter’s Spectrum TV Select subscribers can now access the network, as can customers of NCTC members thanks to an affiliation agreement. The network launched on Sky and Freeview in August and will roll out across Europe before the end of the year via a partnership with **M7**.

PEOPLE

NCTI added former President/CEO of **The Cable Center** *Jana Henthorn* and previous **ACA Connects** President/CEO *Matt Polka* to its board. Additionally, NCTI promoted *Jeff Gibson* to VP, Learning and Development and *Brian Dowell* was hired as Marketing Manager.

Think about that for a minute...

AI – OY!

Commentary by Steve Effros

We've all heard the expression "Oy!" (The full Yiddish version is Oy Vey, denoting frustration, dismay or grief.) But "AI," well, that's another matter. As it turns out, these days just about every article you read about new technology, new business plans, new offerings, heck, even old ones starts out with an explanation of how "AI" is changing that world, how "AI" is going to revolutionize the business, service, industry, science, technology or whatever.

"AI" today is what "5G" was last year to the telecommunications business. In other words, vastly overblown. "AI" stands for artificial intelligence. The first thing almost every computer scientist will tell you is that they're not talking about "intelligence." We do not have computers, yet, that can "think" for themselves. We do not have robots about to take over the world. Skynet is not about to launch.

What "AI" is, however, is a very inexact shorthand for the development of computer software capability that can process vast amounts of data and find correlations, see linkages in data, and recognize and use the potential significance of those linkages if properly programmed. Algorithms are getting extremely sophisticated at either winnowing out the similarities of data points or utilizing those similarities for other purposes.

It's still just "computing," however. It's not "thinking." The programs, the software, the algorithms have to be instructed as to what to do with that data. The difference today is that we have incredible stores of data that were never available before and we have computers that have the speed to sift through that data. Thus, if the instructions are written well enough, it almost appears that the computer is "responding" in real time. Thus the illusion of "learning" and "artificial intelligence."

Now there's a new wrinkle. You're going to hear about it a lot: "Generative AI." What that refers to is the capability, once the right data is made available, for a computer to mimic the sound or brush stroke or style of a singer, musician, composer, artist or author for instance. The unexpectedly rapid capability to do that has caught many by surprise. We are starting to see new

visual depictions that certainly look like something Vincent Van Gogh would have painted, or sound like something created by the Beatles. They aren't. They're depictions and sounds generated from computer instructions that say, for instance, scan existing data for all of Van Gogh's output and then create a picture of a starry night that is similar.

Computer "art" is suddenly all the rage. It's created by "Generative AI." But what is it? That's a very difficult question to answer, especially when the program is designed to stylistically utilize the base data to the point where you can't really tell the origin of the created piece. Whose creativity is it?

This gets extremely complicated when "styles" are mimicked but there is no effort to copy an original. Is that "new" art created by the person who developed the instructions being followed by the computer program or is it "stolen" creativity? There are several such programs now available on the internet. Generative art is proliferating.

Clearly we're going to have to grapple with a whole new set of issues, particularly in the concept of copyright, when Generative AI gets to the point (and surprisingly, it's almost there now) where if there's an effort to directly mimic "real" art, it's exceedingly difficult to tell the difference regarding provenance.

I started today by suggesting we had a problem because the implications of all this for our business is multifaceted, and almost all the facets lead to trouble. For instance, ISPs are required to "take down" illegally distributed "uses" of an artists' copyrighted works. How will we know what's real and what's an AI generated almost-clone? That's just the start. Oy.



Steve

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