

# Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

## O Canada: Rogers, Shaw Get Final Green Light to Merge

Rogers officially has the go-ahead to purchase Shaw, thanks to a statement of approval from François-Philippe Champagne, Canada's Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry. It's the end of a two-year saga for the Canadian operators, but the deal comes with conditions that will not only impact the two companies, but all looking to make major spectrum moves for the time being.

Officially, Champagne's decision is to allow the transfer of spectrum licenses from Shaw's Freedom Mobile to Quebecor's Videotron, effectively creating a national fourth player in the wireless market. It's somewhat similar to the sale of Boost Mobile from Sprint to DISH, which came as a requirement of T-Mobile's 2020 acquisition of Sprint. Rogers, Shaw, the Shaw Family Living Trust and Quebecor agreed early Friday to extend the outside date of closing to April 7, and the deals are expected to close before then.

As conditions of its acquisition of the spectrum licenses, Videotron must offer plans that are comparable to those currently available in Quebec and offer options at least 20% cheaper than those made available by the major players. It cannot transfer the Freedom Mobile licenses away for 10 years, and Videotron will have to expand its 5G wireless network in Freedom Mobile's pre-existing operating territory within two years. Mobile service will be expanded into Manitoba as well through the use of a signed MVNO, and existing Freedom customers will see data allotments increased by 10% as a near-term bonus.

Champagne is hopeful that a fourth competitor will lead to

more affordable pricing for all Canadians, but he's not afraid to take further action if that doesn't come to pass. "If Canadians do not begin to see a clear and meaningful reduction in prices within a reasonable amount of time as a result of this decision, I will have no choice but to use further legislative and regulatory powers to drive down prices," he said in a statement. Among other things, Rogers must also establish a headquarters in Calgary, invest \$1 billion CAD to expand broadband at speeds of at least 50/10 Mbps and dedicate at least \$2.5 billion CAD to enhance its 5G network in western Canada.

"We are very pleased to move forward with this transformative merger and proudly deliver on our commitments to enhance and expand network coverage, connect underserved communities and improve access for low-income Canadians," Rogers President/CEO Tony Staffieri said in a statement. "Building on a shared legacy with Shaw, we will invest substantially to bring more choice, more value and more connectivity to Canadians across the country."

The wider impacts of the deal come with Champagne's decision to initiate a moratorium on all large scale spectrum transfers for the time being. At the same time, he has directed his department to launch a full-scale review of Canada's spectrum transfer framework, something that hasn't been done in nearly a decade. The review's focus will be on the long-term stability of the nation's wireless telecom sector and, potentially, spectrum management policies overall.

While the moratorium is in effect, no proposals or combination of spectrum transfer proposals that represent the transfer of 10%

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or more of the total spectrum holdings of any company holding more than 100 million MHz-pop of commercial mobile spectrum. **Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada** will, however, continue to accept applications for subordinate licenses, the reciprocal transfer of spectrum of equal bandwidth covering the same license area and in the same part of the radio spectrum and other situations regarding smaller spectrum transfers.

Canada introduced a Spectrum Policy Framework in 2013, and since then, ISED has more than doubled the amount of spectrum available for mobile use to 10. More spectrum will be released in the coming year with the auction of 3800 MHz band licenses in October and of mmWave in 2024.

## CABLE ONE LOOKING AT PRICING

**Cable One** is taking a second look at its internet pricing and packaging. “We’ve learned a lot from our investment partners who, again, have different arrays of technology that they get to consumers. We’ve learned a lot from watching competitors in our markets and others. I think it’s time for us to revisit that,” Cable One CEO *Julie Laulis* said during a recent [YetAnotherValueBlog podcast](#), hosted by **Rangeley Capital** Head of Research and Portfolio Manager *Andrew Walker*. Around 2018 the company’s APRU growth was far outpacing unit growth. “I think we’re there again and it’s time to right size to get those folks in balance. We need to make sure that what we’re offering the consumers is a value because they are going to vote with their wallet,” the Cable One chief said. It’s not clear if the company will re-evaluate its data caps, which Laulis calls “data guidelines.” **Sparklight** offers an unlimited data plan as well as unlimited data as part of its 1G internet plan. Other offerings have a \$10 charge for another 100GB each billing cycle, with a \$40 limit in data overages. “If I use 300 gigs a month, I shouldn’t have to pay more because you’re using a terabyte a month,” she said, adding that less than 10% of customers see overage charges. Cable One has long been interested in M&A, but the current economic environment has slowed activity. “We definitely have had some of the smaller family-owned folks come to us and say, ‘Uncle.’ We’re looking at those,” Laulis said, adding that she thinks the current rush to build out fiber and fixed wireless across America will “create opportunities for people who do know how to take care of customers.” She said Cable One kicked the tires on **Suddenlink** when **Altice USA** considered selling it. “Those markets, we would have loved to have owned them when Altice got them. But at this point in time, quite honestly, it’d be easier for us to overbuild them than buy them and then put the capital into them that they require. That’s my opinion,” she said. Meanwhile, it still doesn’t sound like Cable One is ready to jump into MVNO waters. “I was driving through a market and I was talking to someone and my call dropped

repeatedly. It is a somewhat mountainous area of Arizona. It’s hard to build there. It was hard for us to build there. I get why none of the major providers are in one of these markets... If I partner with Brand X but they don’t have coverage for our towns, how does that reflect on us? It’s a negative halo,” Laulis said.

## DISH FACES INVESTOR LAWSUITS

**DISH** investors are launching class-action securities lawsuits after a cybersecurity incident hit the provider in late February and took down multiple company sites and impacted customer call centers. Levi & Korsinsky, Bragar Eigel & Squire and Bernstein Liebhard are among the firms to file class action suits, seeking to recover losses on behalf of investors who were affected by the incident between Feb. 22-27. DISH was made aware of an internal outage on Feb. 27, finding that data from its IT systems were taken.

## GOOGLE FIBER ARRIVES IN MESA

Residents in the Westwood neighborhood of Mesa, Arizona, can now sign up for **Google Fiber**’s 8 Gig service for \$150 per month. It’s also offering its flagship 1 Gig service for \$70 a month, 2 Gig for \$100 a month or 5 Gig for \$125. The 8 Gig offer features symmetrical uploads and downloads of up to 8000 Mbps with a wired connection, along with a Wi-Fi 6 router and two mesh extenders. Google Fiber will continue to build out Mesa and expects to start construction in Chandler, AZ, later this year.

## RATINGS

**YES Network** had an average of 533,000 total viewers for Thursday’s Giants-Yankees Opening Day contest, peaking at 604,000 during the 3pm-3:15pm window. That’s good for the third-most viewed weekday afternoon season opener in YES’ history, which saw the Yankees prevail 5-0. – Early data from **Nielsen** has **Fox News** as the top cable news network as the story of former President *Donald Trump*’s indictment unfolded Thursday. FNC averaged 3.1 million viewers P2+ from 5pm-11pm, reaching 385,000 in the A25-54 group. **MSNBC** was behind with 2.22 million viewers and 266,000 A25-54 in that same timeframe, followed by **CNN** with 1.13 million and 268,000 A25-54. The news broke in the 5pm hour, which brought in an initial audience of 2.96 million for FNC. That led to the 3.34 million that tuned into the network during primetime. – **UPTV**’s programming event “Bring the Spring” surpassed the 1 million-viewer mark, according to **Nielsen**. The event began March 19 with “God Bless the Broken Road” and will wrap up on Easter Sunday (April 9) with the premiere of “Southern Gospel” at 7pm. – **Great American Family** had a big ratings boost in 1Q23, making it two consecutive quarters that the network was

the fastest-growing in cable. For total day, it had a 121% boost in households and 118% jump in total viewers. It had similar stats in prime, with a 118% growth in households and 124% increase for total viewers.

**ON THE CIRCUIT**

We missed the memo that March is Rocco Commisso month! Fresh off his appearance on “60 Minutes,” the **Mediacom** CEO was honored at John Cabot University’s 50th Anniversary Gala this week. The school offers a private American liberal arts education in the heart of Rome, Italy. “Moreso than anyone I have met, Rocco understands the value of a quality education. He will be the first to tell you that the educational opportunities that he received as a young man were a launching pad for his career and a key ingredient in making him the most successful Italian immigrant businessman in American history,” University Board Chair *Sal Salibello* said in his introduction. The dinner set an all-time fundraising record, raising more than \$750,000. Those in attendance included **Charter** Executive Chairman *Tom Rutledge*, who Commisso gave a shout out to from the stage. “Tom is in the process of retiring from Charter and has truly been the gold standard of cable executives in our industry for decades,” he said. Commisso said his story at Mediacom is really one of entrepreneurship: “‘60 Minutes’ show called me a hustler. Entrepreneurship, hustler—same thing as long as it’s always in the good sense.”

**PROGRAMMING**

The inaugural Pickleball Slam is coming to **ESPN** on Sunday at noon, and it’ll have four tennis legends on hand competing for a \$1 million purse. *Andre Agassi, John McEnroe, Michael Chang* and *Andy Roddick* will each compete in one singles match and one doubles match, with Chang facing Roddick and Agassi going against McEnroe. The doubles match—Chang and McEnroe vs Roddick and Agassi—will be played after.

**EDITOR’S NOTE**

You only have until 11:59pm ET tonight to submit your **FAXIES** entry. Our team of judges seeks the most groundbreaking, engaging, interactive and creative campaigns of the year as well as the people behind them. Nominate at [www.TheFAXIES.com](http://www.TheFAXIES.com).

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**Secretary Gina Raimondo** @SecRaimondo

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**Grant Spellmeyer** @GRANTotACA

I was honored to spend time last night with industry legend Rocco Commisso! @MediacomCable @ACAConnects

**Adaptive Spirit** @AdaptiveSpirit

Brain Trust Breakfast! #AS2023 #AdaptiveSpirit #networking #telecom

**Research**

- (Source: [NPAW](#))
- > 76% of SVOD companies plan to introduce ads by 2025.
  - > Implementing a hybrid model with an ad-supported tier as well as a subscription-based one is the preferred path for 59% of them.
  - > 47% of streaming companies are already using a third-party video analytics tool to track platform performance and user behavior.
  - > 39% of ad-based services don't fully trust their ad server data, yet only 25% use third-party ad analytics.

**Up Ahead**

- APRIL 15-19:** [NAB Show](#); Las Vegas
- APRIL 18-19:** [Mid-America Cable Show](#); Omaha
- APRIL 19-20:** [Telecommunications Industry Association's BEAD Success Summit](#); Arlington
- APRIL 26-27:** [Pennsylvania Broadband Summit](#); Lancaster
- APRIL 27:** [Cable Hall of Fame](#); NYC
- MAY 2:** [WICT Network Signature Luncheon](#); L.A.

**Quotable**

“We see our customers at baseball games, at church, in the grocery store. I mean, I myself am wearing a Sparklight shirt and I’m going into a grocery store while I’m in market. Someone may talk to me about an offer, maybe even about a problem. I talked to a customer yesterday, who had moved into one of our markets from Michigan. I called her back to follow up on an issue that she had with our new Sparklight TV. She was like, ‘I am blown away that you called me.’ I’m like, ‘But you wrote me a letter. You had a problem. I needed to fix it. I needed to make sure you’re okay.’”

– Cable One CEO *Julie Laulis* on [Yet Another Value Blog](#) podcast