

Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Breaking News: Tucker Carlson, Don Lemon Out in Major Shakeups

It was spring cleaning time on both sides of cable news' biggest rivalry Monday. *Tucker Carlson* and **Fox Corp.** parted ways Monday in a shock for viewers and the network's competitors.

Fox didn't offer any reason for the decision to end the relationship, but it did announce that Carlson won't be back for a farewell show. His last appearance was on Friday, and "Fox News Tonight" will air live at 8pm tonight as an interim show helmed by rotating Fox News personalities until a new host is named.

To many, Carlson has become the face of the network. Beyond his appearances during primetime, the host had a multiyear deal to produce original specials and a video podcast for **Fox Nation**. The most recent special, "Let Them Eat Bugs," premiered on April 14 and investigated a movement to incorporate more insect-based substitutes into the diet to combat carbon emissions.

His departure comes at a pivotal moment for the network as it tries to move forward from its \$787.5 million settlement with **Dominion Voting Systems** over a defamation lawsuit. There's no evidence at this point that Carlson's departure is tied to the settlement. Fox is still facing a \$2.7 billion suit from **Smartmatic**, another voting systems company that claims the network gave individuals like *Rudy Giuliani* a platform to voice false claims about the 2020 presidential election. Among those named in the suit are Fox as well as on-air hosts *Maria*

Bartiromo, Lou Dobbs and Jeanine Pirro.

Carlson himself and Fox are also facing a lawsuit from his former senior booker *Abby Grossberg*, who has accused the host and the network of sexism and harassment.

What Carlson does next is a toss-up. Does he now look to join a competing network like **Newsmax** or **One America News**, or will he follow in the footsteps of his Fox News predecessor *Bill O'Reilly*, who has now gone independent with No Spin News. O'Reilly was ousted six years ago after the public disclosure of settlements with five women who had complained about inappropriate behavior led advertisers to steer clear of "The O'Reilly Factor." O'Reilly was a similar ratings winner for Fox News. For the week of April 10, which was near the end of his time with the network, episodes of *The O'Reilly Factor* came in as the 3rd and 4th most-watched programming of the week with 3.7 million and 3.6 million viewers, respectively. Fox News was the most-watched cable net in primetime for that same week, averaging 2.38 million total viewers.

What is clear is that competing networks are going to use the departure of one of Fox's most prominent voices as an opportunity to win over viewers. Newsmax used it as an opportunity to paint itself as the true home for conservative news viewers. "For a while Fox News has been moving to become establishment media and Tucker Carlson's removal is a big milestone in that effort," Newsmax CEO Christopher Ruddy said in a statement. "Millions of viewers who liked the old Fox News have made the switch to Newsmax and Tucker's

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departure will only fuel that trend.”

Fox wasn't the only network all over the headlines. At **CNN**, *Don Lemon* was terminated after 17 years with the network. It's been in a state of revamp since *Chris Licht* took over leadership of CNN one year ago, and Lemon has been in hot water in recent months over comments on air about women, including calling female political candidate *Nikki Haley* past her prime.

In a [tweet](#), Lemon said it was his agent that informed him of termination and no one in management told him directly about the decision. “At no time was I ever given any indication that I would not be able to continue to do the work I have loved at the network,” he said. “It is clear that there are some larger issues at play.” Lemon went on to thank his colleagues and the teams he worked with throughout his tenure, calling them the most talented journalists in the business.

CNN's PR team fired off a statement refuting Lemon's account. “He was offered an opportunity to meet with management but instead released a statement on Twitter,” the CNN PR account [tweeted](#).

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CAVANAGH IN SHELL'S NBCU SEAT

After the media world digested Sunday's news that *Jeff Shell* had stepped down as CEO of **NBCUniversal** following an inquiry into a complaint of inappropriate conduct with a female employee, it's now asking who is *Michael Cavanagh*, the **Comcast Corp.** president stepping in to fill Shell's shoes. Cavanagh joined Comcast in 2015 as CFO and made such an impression that last October he was named president—only the third person to hold that role in the company's 60-year history. He's not seen as a Hollywood type—and that may be a good thing as the company looks to move on from the scandal involving Shell. Various reports Sunday named **CNBC** international anchor *Hadley Gamble* as the person who brought the complaint, with her attorney [confirming](#) to the *WSJ* Monday that Gamble filed a complaint of sexual harassment and sex discrimination. “Given these circumstances it is very disappointing that my client's name has been released and her privacy violated,” attorney *Suzanne McKie* told the *WSJ*. An **SEC** filing said Shell's employment was terminated with cause under his employment agreement. Perhaps what's most important to understand about Cavanagh—particularly as some suggest his interim role as NBCU CEO may be long-running—is that he's close with Chairman/CEO *Brian Roberts*, gaining his confidence in a relatively short time. He partners with Roberts to manage all aspects of the business and was already well immersed in NBCU doings. Beyond reassuring a shell-shocked staff, Cavanagh's immediate priorities will

be finding a path to profitability for **Peacock** and improving EBITDA. The streamer has recently generated good buzz for original series “Poker Face” and “Mrs. Davis,” making us anxious to hear what management has to say during Thursday's 1Q23 earnings call.

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ESPN LAYOFFS BEGIN, PARTS WAYS WITH LONGTIME EXEC

The latest round of layoffs came through **ESPN** on Monday, and this time it included the network's second-longest tenured executive in VP, Corporate Communications *Mike Soltys*. It's part of **Disney** CEO *Bob Iger*'s plan to slash the company's workforce by around 7,000 jobs. Soltys was with the company for 43 years, beginning in 1980 when ESPN founder *Bill Rasmussen* hired Soltys as an unpaid intern. Since then, Soltys has had his hand in nearly every aspect of ESPN's communications and currently manages publicity for its news operations, college sports coverage and the company's PR content creation. “My final statement as ESPN Spokesperson: ‘43 Amazing Years. Wow. We wish him well,’” he wrote on [Twitter](#), which was met with an onslaught of good wishes from many in the sports media realm. [Of those](#) was college basketball analyst *Dick Vitale*, who Soltys worked with for the V Foundation. Outside of ESPN, Soltys is the Board Chairman for the community food pantry Bread for Life and is an adviser for Youth Journalism International.

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NAB ASKS COURT TO FORCE ACTION ON QUAD REVIEW

NAB is headed to the courts, filing a petition of mandamus asking a federal court to require the **FCC** to quickly complete the 2018 quadrennial review of broadcast ownership rules. The Commission hasn't completed a review since 2017 and it has long struggled to finish them in a timely fashion. In the last 15 years, it has only completed one ownership review. Despite the 2018 review sitting unfinished, the agency's Media Bureau is already seeking comment for the 2022 quadrennial review period. NAB noted this is also unusual as the Commission's usual practice is to commence quadrennial reviews through a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking to be voted on by the agency's commissioners. “Broadcasters and the hundreds of millions of Americans that depend on us can't wait another day, much less another four years, for the FCC to allow us to compete on a level playing field,” NAB President/CEO *Curtis LeGeyt* said in a statement. “NAB is seeking judicial relief as unfortunately the Commission has left us no other option.”

SHENTEL, FCC REACH SETTLEMENT OVER 911 OUTAGE

Shentel will pay the FCC's Enforcement Bureau \$227,000 to settle an investigation into whether the provider failed to deliver 911 calls during an outage in April 2022. On April 6, Shentel experienced a 911 service outage in West Virginia across Boone, Wyoming, Lewis and McDowell Counties, areas where it provides VoIP service. Customers that dialed the emergency number were only able to access one-way audio and were unable to be heard by 911 operators. The issue was resolved on April 22. Shentel has agreed to implement a compliance plan to ensure it remains in compliance with the Commission's 911 service rules.

ON THE (FILM) CIRCUIT

EchoStar SVP of Regulatory Affairs *Jennifer Manner* is a filmmaker in her spare time and her latest, "[When Wire Was King: The Transformation of Telecommunications](#)," is generating some nice praise. It has been selected by nine film festivals and named a finalist or award winner for seven, including Best Feature Length Documentary by NovaFest 2023 and Best Research and Investigative Documentary by the Angeles Documentaries.

REVIEW BOARD DEEMS VERIZON WIRELESS AD 'PUFFERY'

A **National Advertising Review Board** panel has deemed **Verizon's** use of the phrase "You need a better network" in a holiday-themed commercial as puffery. The challenge was originally brought forth by **AT&T** to the **National Advertising Division**, which [initially found](#) the phrase "conveys an objective comparative superiority message that Verizon's network is better than its competitors, which requires substantiation." NAD recommended Verizon discontinue the claim alongside other implied claims, to which Verizon subsequently appealed based on the fact it didn't reference AT&T or a specific carrier. A majority of the NARB panel determined the phrase ultimately didn't convey a message of superiority and upheld Verizon's stance that the phrase was puffery. Verizon said it was pleased with the panel's decision.

RATINGS

The Latin American Music Awards garnered a cumulative audience of 5.1 million viewers P2+ across **Univision**, **UniMás** and **Galavisión**. The awards show averaged 2.1 million viewers P2+ and 829,000 A18-49. It was the first time Univision held broadcast duties for the Latin AMAs. – The inaugural season of **Food Network's** "Superchef Grudge Match" reached over 10.3 million viewers P2+. It averaged a .5 L+3 rating among P18+ and .65 among W18+ over the course of the season's

11 episodes. Tuesday's season finale had .53 P18+ and .69 W18+ L+3 ratings. Season 2 has already been given the greenlight for a 1Q24 premiere, with production slated to begin later this year.

UPFRONT AND PERSONAL

Telemundo will have a special performance from the reggaeton artist *Nicky Jam* at its upcoming upfront. This year's presentation is themed "Come With Us" as **NBCU** Telemundo Enterprises looks to build on the momentum from the 2022 FIFA Men's World Cup. The upfront will take place at The Glasshouse in Manhattan on May 15 at 6pm.

FIBER FRENZY

Google Fiber unveiled plans to build its network in Pocatello, Idaho. It's the first time the company has ventured into the Gem State. Construction is expected to begin later this year, and Google plans on connecting the first residents and businesses in mid-2024.

PROGRAMMING

Apple TV+ renewed the travel series "The Reluctant Traveler with Eugene Levy" for a second season. Season 1 premiered Feb. 24, with all episodes available on the platform. – **HGTV** is headed to Zambia for its first African-based series. Debuting May 15 at 9pm, "Renovation Wild" will chronicle the fixes of two Zambian safari resorts in an eight-episode season. – The horror movie "Scream VI" will be available to stream on **Paramount+** starting Tuesday in the U.S. and Canada. Viewers can purchase the movie on digital as well, and more international markets will be added at a later date. – Production has begun for Season 6 of **Discovery Channel's** "Street Outlaws: No Prep Kings." The show is shaking things up with its format for the upcoming season. Eight teams will compete for a championship instead of having individual racers. The season's first event will see eight captains draft from a pool of more than 40 drivers. – **AMC Networks'** streamer **ALL-BLK** gave the thumbs up for a second season of the dating comedy "À La Carte."

PEOPLE

Comcast appointed *Chris Smith* as SVP, Greater Chicago Region (central and northern Illinois, northern Indiana and southwest Michigan) effective May 8. He's been with the company since 2014 and will now manage HR, operations, customer experience, business strategy and development, marketing, sales, finance, government relations, community investment and communications. Smith—who has more than 20 years of experience in telecommunications—was most recently VP, Sales and Marketing for the Greater Chicago Region.

Q&A With Amdocs Division President of Communications, Media and Technology, Pablo Cella

As part of the Amdocs team for over a decade and with over 30 years in communications, media, and technology, Pablo Cella has a unique vantage point of knowing where the industry is headed and where the company fits that landscape. His specialization in cable leaves him well-versed in how TV and Communications have adapted and will continue to do so. By focusing on business growth and customer success, Cella was able to help the company navigate its transformation, which focuses on “Making It Amazing.” As part of this journey, Amdocs has also pivoted to be more agile in both its mindset and technology, allowing it to work with companies of all sizes on more values-based projects.



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WHAT SHOULD READERS THINK OF WHEN THEY THINK OF AMDOCS?

We constantly evolve and reinvent to be ahead of the market to address what will be needed; I would like us to be seen as an innovative company beyond billing. We started with billing, then customer care, and now, we made huge inroads into media, network, digital experience, and cloud.

WHAT DO YOU CONSIDER YOUR BIG PIVOT?

A few years ago, we realized the industry needed a drastic change, requiring a more flexible, agile environment to keep pace with native digital players. We revamped our workforce, products, and services to be cloud-first, microservices, and DevOps. We also have evolved to enable transformational agility for faster time to value for our customers and our customer's customers.

HOW DOES “MAKE IT AMAZING” COME IN?

“Make It Amazing” is not saying we at Amdocs are amazing. It's about ensuring our customers can provide their customers with an amazing experience. It does not matter the size of the customer, large or small; we support large global and smaller local operators. Our job is not just to do the day-to-day work to do the project but also to be a trusted advisor to our customers. When we talk about our success, it is about what we mean to our customers and our customers' customers. Like, we enable our customer's customers to have a better experience or to have connectivity in underserved areas. That completely changed the way we think, the way we interact.

WHAT INDUSTRY TRENDS ARE YOU SEEING?

Because we're a global company, we have a pulse on global trends. One of the key things we're seeing now is the lifestyle concept, an opportunity cable providers can succeed in if they prepare for it. You're no longer going to buy a bundle of internet and mobile or internet and TV; you will get a package that will fit your, or your family's, specific day-to-day needs and wants. Cable companies have all the elements to make an amazing

experience—10G, media, technology, and hyperconnectivity. With Amdocs' expertise and partnerships with hundreds of content and experience providers, our broadband customers have an amazing competitive advantage when you combine all that.

WHAT DO YOU SEE AS SOME OF THE BIGGEST OPPORTUNITIES TODAY?

Cable and fiber broadband have more competition, and they must be more creative to see continued success. While there is a lot of emphasis on speed, it's not the only area that should be considered. Going back to the lifestyle concept, I think differentiation will become more sophisticated and focus on personas versus a “one size fits all” experience. Some personas want to be connected everywhere; others want to work from home for part of the week, have an ultra-reliable network for console and cloud gaming, or when creating content for social channels. There is an opportunity because broadband providers will need applications that will support all these dynamic scenarios in a way that will enable their customers to buy differently, access different services and care differently, to receive the bills and invoices and pay differently. You cannot do that with the legacy, old-school cycle base and systems. You need to be future-ready, and we can help.

MY LAST QUESTION IS A BIT OF A PIVOT, BUT YOU'VE BEEN MENTORING. WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT TO YOU?

I spent time thinking about how to give back. During the pandemic, I started giving sessions to students that are about to graduate from my hometown university in Argentina. I even went to Argentina and did a face-to-face. I'm available to all of them. They have my email, my phone number. There were a few kids that were about to give up, and because of the lectures, they decided to graduate. I also do mentoring through the HITEC group for emerging mid-career and early career Hispanic professionals that are trying to get to the next level, trying to get promoted, want to try different things. I also learn a lot along the way. I get exposed to younger professionals that are doing very interesting things. In retrospect, I should have started mentoring earlier. We always believe that we have to reach a certain level to start mentoring and that's not the case. The moment that you have a job, you can mentor someone that doesn't have a job.

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