

Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Call Waiting: Associations Urge Caution on STIR/SHAKEN Changes

The FCC's STIR/SHAKEN framework to eradicate robocalls has largely been effective, but it remains delicate and industry associations are warning the Commission to be careful as it looks to adopt further changes to how it handles call authentication.

A number of the smaller communications providers within **ACA Connects'** membership are resellers of voice service over their last-mile broadband networks, and many of those providers receive service from a wholesale provider that has implemented STIR/SHAKEN in its network. Those third-party caller ID authentication solutions have been a cost-effective option that have also spread the benefits of the STIR/SHAKEN technology.

In comments to the FCC, **NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association** acknowledged the value of third-party caller ID authentication arrangements between service providers and groups that authenticate calls on their behalf, but it has concerns that certain variations of those arrangements could undermine the integrity of the STIR/SHAKEN ecosystem.

While trackback efforts aim to get to the source of robocalls, that can only happen when all providers work together and put their stamp on each call as it travels through providers' networks. NTCA doesn't support a prohibition or limits on the use of third-party authentication services, and would rather like the Commission to adopt safeguards that would close those vulnerabilities within the system. NTCA suggested the agency require that all originating service providers using third-party

signing arrangements register to receive their own certificates that could then be used to sign calls.

"While NTCA is certainly sympathetic to concerns regarding cost given its representation of smaller operators, these requirements are simple and relatively inexpensive—and the low cost of obtaining tokens and certificates is certainly outweighed by the benefit of closing a serious security vulnerability that could harm consumers and undermine the industry's extensive investment in STIR/SHAKEN," it said.

In its own filing, ACA Connects agreed that there are situations where a provider could employ a third-party for call authentication as a ploy to avoid scrutiny, but those need to be managed differently than the legitimate and verified business relationships the association's members strike with outside vendors.

"The Commission should affirm the permissibility of third-party call authentication arrangements between wholesale providers and reseller customers of the sort described herein," ACA said, saying doing so could strengthen the entire caller ID authentication regime. "By the same token, if the Commission deems it necessary to adopt rule changes that 'prohibit' or 'restrict' the use of third-party arrangements for call authentication in some circumstances, it should make clear that legitimate arrangements of the kind described in these comments are out of scope."

The association argued that any move of the contrary would have a perverse effect and disrupt STIR/SHAKEN for many small-er voice service providers and their largely rural customer base.

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The screenshot shows the Cablefax Daily website interface. At the top, there are navigation links for 'THE DAILY', 'AWARDS & EVENTS', 'THE MAGAZINE', 'SPECIAL REPORTS', 'THE LISTS', and 'JOBS'. A search bar is also present. The main content area features a 'Featured in this Issue' section with a list of companies including Amazon, AMC, AMC Networks, Apple, BBC America, BET, BET Studios, Charter, Comcast, Cox Communications, Disney, DOJ, Estrella TV, Evoca, Facebook, Fox Corp, Fox Deportes, Fox Nation, FTC, Galavision, Goldman Sachs, Google, Hisense, Hotwire Communications, Hulu, IFC, Locast, Microsoft, MSNBC, NAB, NBC, NBC News, NBCUniversal, Netflix, NFL RedZone, Pantaya, Peacock, SCTE, Show, Sony Cine, SundanceTV, Telemundo, Tubi, UniMás, Univision, ViacomCBS, and WE tv. Below this is a 'SHOW FEATURED' section with a featured article titled 'Still Assisting: Charter Looks to Aid Community Centers, Job Training'. The left sidebar contains a 'The Daily' section for Wednesday-September 15, 2021, with a 'FULL ARCHIVES' link and a 'PDF' icon. Callouts A through E are placed over the interface to highlight specific features: A (Subscriber Login), B (Featured in this Issue), C (Issue headlines on the left nav bar), D (PDF version access), and E (Full Archives link).

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The FCC has been cracking down on violators of robocall rules even more recently, adopting a \$5.13 million fine against *John Burkman, Jacob Alexander Wohl* and J.M. Burkman & Associates, LLC, Tuesday for making 1,141 unlawful robocalls.

The robocalls, made on Aug. 26 and Sept. 14, 2020, told potential voters that if they voted by mail, their “personal information will be part of a public database that will be used by police departments to track down old warrants and be used by credit card companies to collect outstanding debts.”

The Commission originally proposed the fines in 2021, but Burkman and Wohl argued that the dialing companies they hired to make the calls were responsible for any alleged violations. However, the Enforcement Bureau’s investigation in partnership with the Ohio Attorney General’s Office found emails from Burkman and Wohl directing the dialing companies on specific details of the calling campaign. With that in mind, the FCC unanimously rejected Burkman and Wohl’s arguments.

PGA TOUR, LIV TO MERGE

The conclusion of the battle between the **PGA Tour** and **LIV Golf** is headed for a merger. The two organizations announced plans to combine the PGA Tour, DP World Tour and the Public Investment Fund of Saudi Arabia (which owns LIV) and also ended all ongoing litigation. It’s a move that’ll have large-scale ramifications for golf, but it also leaves questions for the networks involved in broadcasting the sport—especially LIV’s partner **The CW Network**. While it’s unclear what CW’s involvement in the future organization’s broadcast plans looks like, there won’t be any changes for at least 2023. “This is an exciting day to unify and grow the game of golf. There is no change to the LIV Golf event schedule for 2023 on The CW,” the network said in a statement. “We look forward to broadcasting seven more exciting tournaments this year featuring the world’s best golfers.”

IAB TECH LAB FORMS ADDRESSABLE GROUP

A new collective that’ll lead the development of technology frameworks, technical standards and market strategy to make every TV environment addressable was formed by **IAB Tech Lab**. It’s called the Advanced TV Commit Group, which hopes to increase interoperability and standardization across TV. The first batch of members are **Paramount, NBCUniversal, E.W. Scripps, Warner Bros. Discovery, Nielsen, Xperi, VAB, GroupM, Extreme Reach** and **Publica**, and several more are expected to join soon. The companies will focus on achieving universal addressability and reconciliation for audience measurement across screens as well as complete cross-environment audits for ad campaign delivery.

ALL SMILES WITH FIBER

With fiber internet leading the way in customer satisfaction compared to non-fiber service, **AT&T** finds itself at the top among ISPs in overall customer satisfaction. The **American Customer Satisfaction Index** released its Telecommunications Study for 2022-23, which scores satisfaction on a 0-100 scale. AT&T Fiber checked in at 80, edging **CenturyLink** Fiber’s 78 and **Google Fiber**’s 76. **Verizon** Fios came in at 75 and **Frontier** Fiber and **Xfinity** Fiber recorded 74 and 73, respectively. **T-Mobile** topped non-fiber ISPs with a 73. AT&T Internet followed at 72 and **Sparklight** came third with 71. The study included satisfaction with streaming apps, and it was **Prime Video** that led things with an 80. **Peacock** had a 79 and four platforms—**Hulu, Netflix, Paramount+** and **YouTube Premium**—had a 78.

DIRECTV FLIES WITH SOUTHWEST

DirecTV is partnering with **Southwest Airlines** to provide in-flight live TV and on-demand content. It’ll start with 14 live channels like **CNN, FOX, ESPN** and others, but all DirecTV customers who purchase the \$8 Southwest internet package can log into the DirecTV app and access all of their channels.

FUBO MAKES THIRD MLB DEAL

First were the Boston Red Sox and Cleveland Guardians, and now **Fubo** is partnering with the St. Louis Cardinals. The vMVPD will have branding displayed at select Cardinals’ home games along with fan engagement opportunities. Season ticket holders will also have the option to get an extended free trial of Fubo, while non-season ticket holders can still capitalize on a 14-day trial. Fubo carries the Cards’ RSN **Bally Sports Midwest** as well as national networks **ESPN, FOX, FS1** and **MLB Network**.

IN THE COURTS

Circle City Broadcasting’s [appeals](#) of the dismissals of its racial discrimination suits against **DISH** and **DirecTV** are continuing forward in the 7th Circuit Court of Appeals. The court orders most cases to mediation before briefing begins, and so is the case here. DirecTV and Circle City’s mediation date is set as July 10, while the DISH date is June 29. However, those dates could change because of vacation schedules, etc. On March 31, the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Indiana granted DISH and DirecTV’s motions for summary judgment, declaring that there wasn’t evidence of a discriminatory motive for not entering into a retransmission consent contract with the broadcaster.

AT&T GETS AN UPGRADE

SVB MoffettNathanson upgraded **AT&T** to “market perform” from “underperform” and keeping its target price unchanged at \$17. “We don’t see things in wireless generally, or at AT&T specifically, getting materially better. We do, however, believe that AT&T’s stock price now appropriately reflects reality,” the firm said. SVB MoffettNathanson is maintaining its “market perform” ratings on **Verizon** and **T-Mobile**, but it lowered T-Mobile’s price target to \$172 from \$181 and dropped Verizon’s to \$40 from \$42. “The sharp declines in stock prices for all of the Big Three, and for AT&T in particular, reflect an appropriately sober view. AT&T’s shares now trade below the target price we set a year ago when we first moved to an underperform rating, and we do not believe that further cuts are warranted,” a research note said.

NFL CBRS WAIVER REDUX

The **NFL** is seeking a two-year extension of its 2022 waiver of **FCC** rules that gave it the OK to continue to operate its coach-to-coach CBRS communication system in the event of a localized internet outage at an NFL stadium during an NFL game, and in which the outage occurs only after authority to operate within the stadium has been obtained from a Spectrum Access System. The FCC rules are intended to prevent harmful interference to other CBRS operators. Given the limited set of circumstances that would trigger the need to invoke the waiver, it’s not surprising that the NFL [didn’t need to use it](#) last year. However, the league said the previous reasons underlying the need for a waiver still apply. Should utilization ever be needed, the NFL said the waiver “could only be actually utilized for less than 1% of a year; for only a few hours on a given day; and in a miniscule geographic footprint inside a venue with profound signal attenuation.”

WEEKLY RATINGS

Fox News is back in the No. 2 spot in the weekly primetime ratings among cable networks. **TNT** maintained its spot at the top with 2.13 million viewers P2+, but Fox News unseated **ESPN** with 1.36 million. **MSNBC** was third at 991,000 and ESPN fourth with 884,000. **INSP** completed the top five with 789,000. Nothing changed in total-day ratings, though. Fox News made it 22 consecutive weeks leading the category with 1.01 million viewers. MSNBC (665,000), TNT (544,000), ESPN (445,000) and **HGTV** (427,000) came behind FNC.

CARRIAGE

Warner Bros. Discovery is still making moves in the FAST space. **MotorTrend Group**—owned by WBD—is having its **MotorTrend FAST TV** linear channel join **The Roku Channel**’s lineup, adding to its distribution on **Amazon Freevee**, **Samsung TV Plus**, **Vizio** and others. MotorTrend FAST TV will come with shows like “Roadkill,” “Texas Metal” and “Faster with Finnegan.”

FIBER FRENZY

Comcast is growing its Xfinity 10G network to 25 rural areas across 22 counties in Florida. It’s doing so through the state’s Broadband Opportunity Program, in which Comcast was awarded \$50 million in grants to bring service to nearly 40,000 additional customers.

DOING GOOD

Vexus Fiber awarded \$51,000 total to the winners of the 2023 Vexus Scholarship Award. The 17 recipients will each receive a \$3,000 tuition scholarship from the company’s Vexus Scholarship Program, which awards scholarship funds to high school seniors in rural communities within Vexus’ footprint. The program has given over \$120,000 since its creation in 2018.

PROGRAMMING

Chicken Soup for the Soul Entertainment will have a new lifestyle series arrive on its free streamer **Crackle** on June 23. “At Home with Genevieve,” which will be presented by PetSmart via a brand partnership agreement, will feature interior designer *Genevieve Gorder* giving viewers ideas on how to spice up their homes. – It’s soccer season at **Apple TV+**. It announced a new untitled docuseries centered on the superstar *Lionel Messi* and his career that recently culminated with a World Cup title. – **aspireTV**’s cooking series “Downright Delicious with Yo-Yo” will debut tonight at 8pm. – **Fox News**’ chief political anchor *Bret Baier* will be interviewing former President *Donald Trump* on June 19. The discussion will air at 6pm during “Special Report” and focus on the 2024 Republican Presidential primary. – “Loudmouth,” a documentary chronicling Reverend *Al Sharpton*’s life and journey, will premiere on **Showtime**’s streaming and on-demand platforms June 16. It’ll make its linear debut June 18 at 10pm. – **MGM+** picked up “Psycho: The Lost Tapes of Ed Gein.” The four-episode true-crime docuseries will debut on the platform in Sept. – Season 3 of **The Weather Channel**’s docuseries “Deep Water Salvage” will begin Sunday at 8pm. A marathon of Season 2 will precede the premiere from 3-8pm.

PEOPLE

Breezeline made a trio of hirings to its senior leadership team. *Michelle Ramler* will take over as VP, Marketing and head the development and execution of all marketing strategies and activities. *Heather McCallion* was tapped as VP, New Business Opportunities and Business Transformation. It’s a newly made role that has her leading the company’s business transformation efforts, including new revenue streams and business opportunities, continuous improvement, process efficiencies and project management. Lastly, *Shaun Blake* was upped from Director, Technical Operations to VP, Products and Programming. Blake will oversee new and existing product, programming and pricing strategies.