

# Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

## 5Qs: Thakker Embraces New Challenges as NCTA CTO

With new waves of technology hitting companies seemingly every day, NCTA—The Internet & Television Association had a big decision to make following the departure of longtime CTO and SVP, Science & Technology William Check. The association landed on Rikin Thakker, who comes with a background in wireless and will lead NCTA members at a time when cable companies are embracing mobile. **CFX** spoke with Thakker about his vision for NCTA and his career up to his appointment. Below are edited excerpts of the conversation.

### What drew you to NCTA?

I was aware of NCTA's mission and its contribution to the industry when I was with MMTC [the Multicultural Media, Telecom and Internet Council]. I've seen how it addresses some of the important topics ranging from rural broadband, to closing the digital divide and all the amazing innovation that goes with that. But when I learned about the opportunity, I knew that I had to jump on it because if I let it pass, I would regret it and it probably might not come back anytime soon.

### What are your initial priorities?

Getting to know our member companies better. I'm already having meetings with their CTO offices and planning to visit their technology hubs or centers. Also getting to know our partners, and I'm referring here to CableLabs, SCTE. There are some exceptional technical folks there who are working very closely with our member companies as well. For this

particular office, I see internal stakeholders and external, so I'm also going to have meetings and work with the department heads internally to understand their expectations and the ongoing engagement they have with the technology office here that I'm leading now. I'm looking into attending some of the conferences and shows of our industry. The immediate one is going to be the CableLabs Small Market Conference that's happening later this month. And at the bigger scale, SCTE's Cable-Tec Expo in October as well. Not just to attend, but possibly contribute as well.

### What do you see as your role as the CTO of an association?

The main role is to keep an eye on the future technologies and how that will shape the future of connectivity and entertainment in general. When you're CTO of a company, you're going to stay focused on your company's technology, technological advancements, your products, your services and your quality priorities. Then when you're a CTO of an association, you are representing CTO offices of many member companies, and they have different products, they have different services and they'll have different policy priorities as well. So as part of this role [as] CTO of an association, my job is to make sure that we enhance our member companies' technical capabilities and showcase in different forms how they positively impact day to day lives of millions of Americans.

### You have a seat at a lot of tables. How will that myriad of experiences help you guide NCTA's stances on tech-

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## nology policies and standards?

They enhance my ability to do my current job, frankly. At the FCC's TAC, I was part of the 6G working group—and that engagement actually was based on my previous association [Wireless Infrastructure Association]. It's not individual appointments. So I'm glad that NCTA also has a seat at the same committee and I'm glad that I'll be able to actually continue my contribution there. NTIA's CSMAC, that's an individual appointment and I feel very honored and proud to be part of that committee. I sit on two different working groups there. One is the shared spectrum Working Group and the other one is 6G. This federal advisory committee has allowed me to be among the best and brightest and a very diverse group of SMEs who share a common vision and that is to help the U.S. maintain its leadership in connectivity solutions and innovation. As for the University of Maryland, this is my 13th year now. I love to teach. I love to give back to the students. The program where I teach actually allows the faculty members like me who come from the industry to bring our industry experience practices into the classroom, and they don't have to follow a textbook. Instead, we can create our own lesson modules that work in industry. Students love it. The industry also loves the fact that the students are ready from day one. I learn a lot from my interactions with students. It keeps me young.

**When you were at MMTC, you were active in bridging the digital divide with a focus on advocating for equal opportunity. How far have things come in that regard since you left in 2020?**

My experience there was invaluable. It introduced me to the inner workings of policy and advocacy efforts. The mission there at MMTC, and still, is very noble. In fact, through MMTC, I was selected to be part of FCC's BDAC—the Broadband Deployment Advisory Committee—and many of the recommendations we produced for the FCC, whether it was model codes for states or model codes for municipalities, they were adopted by the FCC. Also, I was appointed to be the co-chair of the broadband training and workforce working group there. And we're able to actually incorporate many of the Equal Opportunity priorities of MMTC into our recommendations there as well.

## COMCAST LAUNCHES DOCSIS LOW LATENCY TRIALS

**Comcast** said it's conducting the industry's first low latency DOCSIS field trials in collaboration with **Apple**, **NVIDIA** and **Valve** as it prepares to make the technology available to customers by the end of the year. It works by having app developers tag latency sensitive traffic, such as video conferencing, gaming and VR, so that **CableLabs** technology standard LLD

can then manage the low latency flows to optimize application performance and quality for customers who use those applications. Xfinity subs who live in trial markets and lease the latest Xfinity 10G Gateway (XB7 and XB8 models) or own an Arris S33 or Netgear CM1000v2 gateway can participate in the trial. While Comcast is working with its initial partners on the trials, a [blog post](#) said any app developers interested in participating can email to express their interest. "A good example of this new [low latency] capability was demonstrated during Apple's Worldwide Developer Conference using a sample real-time application to achieve dramatically improved video conferencing quality. iOS 17, iPadOS 17, macOS Sonoma, and tvOS 17 have built-in support for L4S so that devices will offer a seamless streaming experience, for example, while using FaceTime," wrote *Jason Livingood*, Comcast's VP of Technology Policy, Product & Standards Engineering. "The field trials will also demonstrate the improvements in handling latency-sensitive applications like NVIDIA's cloud gaming service, GeForce NOW."

## NTIA DISTRIBUTES MAJORITY OF MIDDLE MILE GRANT FUNDS

**NTIA** is granting \$930 million through its \$1 billion Enabling Middle Mile Broadband Infrastructure Program, a fund designed to direct dollars toward the construction, improvement or acquisition of middle mile infrastructure. The middle mile projects will cover more than 350 counties across 35 states and Puerto Rico, and lead to the deployment of more than 12,000 miles of new fiber. Awardees are investing an additional \$848.46 million of outside match funding into the projects. The process to receive the grants was competitive with more than 260 applications being submitted with over \$7.47 billion in funding requests. Additional grants will be announced on a rolling basis.

## DIAMOND SPORTS MAKES RIGHTS PAYMENT TO THE TEXAS RANGERS

**Diamond Sports** has paid the Texas Rangers for their local TV rights, a move that will keep the **MLB** team's games on **Bally Sports Southwest**. That's according to a [report](#) from the *Dallas Morning News* citing sources close to the team. Diamond was obligated to play the team in full by Thursday or sacrifice its rights to air games, and it has chosen to shed some rights as it moves through Chapter 11 bankruptcy. It will need to make similar decisions in the next month with other MLB teams, including the Arizona Diamondbacks, Cleveland Guardians and

the Minnesota Twins.

**A-CAM ITEM ON CIRCULATION**

**FCC** Chairwoman *Jessica Rosenworcel* has circulated an order that would extend the Alternative Connect America Model program and require deployment of 100/20Mbps or faster speeds to all areas served by it. A-CAM serves some of the most remote areas in the country. “The Commission’s universal service high-cost programs have a track record of supporting networks that connect remote communities across the country,” Rosenworcel said in a statement. “But to keep pace with the demand for reliable broadband and meet the needs of consumers today and into the future, we need to optimize these programs to bring higher speeds and greater bandwidth to consumers.” **NCTA** has asked the FCC to make sure money doesn’t go to A-CAM projects where non-ACAM providers have made commitments to build out to 100/25 speeds or already offer it. “While we do not know the details of the order, we have significant concerns with any decision that includes a long-term commitment of billions of dollars annually that is available solely to legacy phone companies and deprives the affected communities of the opportunity to participate in BEAD and obtain more robust performance from cable operators and other providers. Given the significant amount of funding at stake, we encourage the Commission to release the draft item for public review before voting,” NCTA said Friday.

**DOING GOOD**

**Charter** awarded \$400,000 in scholarships to the 2023 class of Spectrum Scholars, the company’s college scholarship program for underrepresented students with financial need. Each of the 20 students in this year’s class will receive a \$20,000 scholarship, be assigned a Charter mentor and be given the opportunity to be interns at one of the distributor’s corporate offices in Stamford, Charlotte, St. Louis or Denver.

**EDITOR’S NOTE**

In observance of Juneteenth, your next issue of **Cablefax Daily** will arrive Tuesday, June 20.

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**Research**

(Source: [Hub 2023 Best Bundle Survey](#))

- > For the first time, the average number of TV sources used by each respondent declined YOY from 7.4 in 2022 to 6.4 in 2023.
- > The big five SVODs (Netflix, Amazon Prime, Hulu, Disney+ and HBO Max) in particular suffered subscriber declines and the proportion of those using three or more of those SVODs fell YOY.
- > Usage of FAST channels continued to grow in 2023, particularly with households cutting the cord. 57% of respondents said they watch at least one FAST platform.

**Up Ahead**

**JUNE 21:** [FBA Regional Fiber Connect](#); Lake Tahoe, CA

**JUNE 22:** [Media Institute Luncheon with Michael O’Rielly](#); DC

**JUNE 26:** WICT Network DC/Baltimore [Women in Sports](#), DC

**JULY 30-AUGUST 2:** [The Independent Show 2023](#); Minneapolis, MN

**AUGUST 7-8:** [C2HRCon](#), Brooklyn

**Quotable**

*“I think when we want to talk about balanced spectrum policy, we want to ensure that all of these access models have the spectrum to provide the throughput capacity they need and can meet demand. And I think right now, there’s a really good case to be made that we need additional spectrum allocated for these exclusive license models and so this is the model of spectrum access that our members primarily rely on to provide mobile service to your smartphone that’s available ubiquitously. This technology is in extremely high demand. We’re seeing projections of five times growth in mobile data throughput in the next five years, but we don’t really quite yet have a confirmed plan in place to see the spectrum that will be necessary to meet that level of demand.”* – **CTIA Assistant VP, Policy Communications Doug Brake speaking on spectrum policy at an MMTC event Tuesday**