

Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Holding On: Indy Show Debates What to Do With Video, Mobile

Video may no longer be the core part of any broadband provider's business model, but it was still a meaningful part of the conversation during the opening sessions of **The Independent Show** Monday.

"It's all about trying to understand how video, which was the product back in the day, is now a product and it comes in a lot of flavors and variations," **NCTC** CEO *Lou Borrelli* told conference attendees. "What we're trying to do is move forward and try to offer you solutions and choices as to how you would go forward with your video."

Through it all, the co-op is also continuing to do what it has always done—negotiating the best deals it can to enable folks that want to be able to stay in the linear business to be able to do that for as long as possible. "Frankly, I'm hoping that we'll be able to do some type of video option that would go with a mobile service as well," Borrelli added.

NCTC members have a seemingly endless amount of flavors of how they are offering video, and part of that is because each of their areas requires a different strategy that shapes how they're moving forward. **Bluepeak** CTO *Cash Hagen* said during a separate panel that, like others, his company is using it to drive broadband penetration as high as it can go.

"I think it's really unique and not everywhere is created equal. When you operate in rural America in non-Tier I markets, local TV is still unbelievably valuable," he said.

At **Cable One**, less than 10% of its customers are taking video today. The rate of decline has been rapid, and if the provider isn't pushing marketing directly toward that product, it doesn't see any new, organic subs. And as everyone continues to move through this year of retrans negotiations, Cable One Chief Technology and Digital Officer *Ken Johnson* is only becoming more discouraged about how long operators will be able to reasonably justify selling linear video.

"As we go through this cycle, it's just getting more and more broken and the economic model for the people that produce the content and distribute the content, they'll all going direct-to-consumer," he said. "It feels a bit like a falling knife... I think, as a product, we're no longer focused a lot on video, but I think the timeframe where video is going to be an important part of our business is certainly shortened."

As decisions around video become more complex, the mobile ecosystem is only looking more attractive to many NCTC members. It's not necessarily a simple business either with operators long having concerns about margins and the intricacies of selling another set of devices. Johnson and other members of the Cable One leadership team have been looking at potentially entering mobile for the last three or four years, and he's still not sure which way that domino will fall. For him, the big payoff with mobile is the possibility for it to reduce churn.

"We're trying to better understand that model and see how big of an impact that can actually have," he said.

MTCO Communications CTO *Brian Kettman* is also excited



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about how mobile could, like video, help operators capture customers and keep them around for the long haul. “It’s the stickiness of having an extra service and a very important service to the customer,” he said.

Not every NCTC member is ready to embrace the mobile game with open arms. There are those that remember similar conversations around ISPs taking on mobile in the mid-2000s, and the economics, service and complications with handsets were a challenge then. Hagen isn’t convinced that any of those dynamics have changed and, at the same time, competitors have only become stronger.

“It’s my personal opinion, but also that of the company, is to do what we do well, then do it better and focus on, as cliché as it might sound, core competencies,” he said. “That’s not something that we know. Maybe, individually, sample sizes of, but not worth taking the eye off the ball.”

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CABLEFAX REVEALS 2023 TOP OPS

Cablefax: The Magazine’s 2023 Top Ops issue dropped today, with **Cox Communications** taking home the MSO of the Year title and **GCI** receiving the Independent Operator of the Year honor. Even with a leadership change, Cox never missed a beat, launching an MVNO and pushing into new spaces in IoT solutions. GCI is taking on some of the toughest of conditions imaginable to connect Alaskans to broadband, while also looking within to make sure it is a diverse and inclusive place to work. **Metronet** received the first-ever Fiber Provider of the Year award for its breakneck pace of fiber rollouts. **Charter** Executive Chairman *Tom Rutledge*, CFX’s Founders Circle honoree, reflects in the magazine on his 50 years in the industry—both on what went right and what didn’t. Other honorees include Tech Executive of the Year *JR Walden* of **Mediacom**, **EPB** for Launch of the Year, Customer Champion *Don Schena* of **WOW!**, Lifetime Achievement honorees *Jana Henthorn* and *Steve White*, Employee Connection winner **Cable One** and many more. Read the digital issue [here](#) and check out the sharable, online profiles at CablefaxTopOps.com.

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INDEPENDENT SHOW NOTEBOOK

We’ve all heard about the potential to use technologies like AI and VR to train technicians and manage network issues, but some technicians are already pushing the bounds of how they can be used in the field. Recently, **Cable One** Chief Technology and Digital Officer *Ken Johnson* heard a story about an inexperienced tech asking **ChatGPT** to assist him in diagnosing an issue in the field. ChatGPT used **SCTE** standards and resources from **NCTI** to identify a potential problem, walk the tech through the steps to fix that and

write a summary the tech could post in the company’s workforce management system. “Ultimately, ChatGPT was able to guide the tech to fix the problem,” Johnson said during an **Independent Show** panel Monday. “That’s pretty amazing when you think about that and how generative AI is going to really reinvent the way we approach work and reinvent how we are wired, where our relationships with customers live and I think that’s pretty powerful.” – The female chairs of **ACA Connects** and **NCTC** used their moment on the main stage Monday to celebrate all that is possible at small, but mighty organizations. Both have had to maneuver complicated media and legislative landscapes, and while it can be tough to keep up with the issues of the day, ACA Connects Chair *Patty Boyers* believes it is the little guy who is best fit to shift positions and manage shifts in customer behavior. “You can be agile and you can be flexible, and you can move on a dime a lot quicker than those big lumbering companies with multi-level boards of directors and mid-level management,” Boyers said. NCTC Chair *Elaine Partridge* said during her time at **Galaxy Cablevision**, the company totally reworked its five-year plan to try to keep up with the shifting media landscape. Being challenged in that way opened a world of possibility, and that sort of thinking is a powerful tool, she said. “What new things can we bring in, and we’ve challenged a lot in the last few years. I think you’ll see some new things, new initiatives coming out like the MVNO,” she said. “I think that’s the wave of the future. And while maybe we don’t get it right today, maybe this is the start of the next phase of the NCTC.”

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DUGGAN, KRISTOL JOIN FOX TV STATION LICENSE FIGHT

Former **PBS** President and past FCC Commissioner *Ervin Duggan* and ex-*Weekly Standard* Editor *William Kristol* have joined the fight to get the FCC to hold a hearing on whether **Fox Corp.** leadership has violated the character requirements expected from public trustees granted a broadcast license. **Media and Democracy Project** filed a formal [petition](#) earlier this month to deny the license renewal application of **Fox Corp.** owned station **WTXF** in Philadelphia, citing the **Dominion** voting case. **Fox Television Stations** has called the petition frivolous and completely without merit. “Though we were members of different parties when we served in government, and though we have had different perspectives on many issues during our respective careers, we both strongly believe that American democracy must be grounded in open, respectful, and factual debate,” Duggan and Kristol wrote in their informal objection to Fox’s license. Kristol held senior positions in the *Ronald Reagan* and *George H. W. Bush* administrations, while Duggan is a veteran of the *Lyndon Johnson* White House. The two urged the FCC to look beyond an individual station’s record in licens-

ing proceedings and to consider affiliated identities' conduct when appropriate (in this case **Fox News** and **Fox Business**). By the way, *Preston Padden's* [GoFundme](#) for legal fees in the fight has hit the \$4,500 mark.

WBD SHAKES UP AD SALES ORG

It's a new chapter for the ad sales unit at **Warner Bros. Discovery** in the midst of a turbulent ad market. Chief U.S. Ad Sales Officer *Jon Steinlauf* unveiled a new strategy and structure for the organization Monday as the group looks to capture momentum in a less-than-stellar year in ad sales so far. The reorg will take place over the next several weeks, with Steinlauf targeting Labor Day for when the new structure is fully formed. Under the new organization, ad agency partners will work with dedicated sales leaders from WBD to provide them with direct access to WBD's brands. Leading the agency-focused teams will be EVP, Ad Sales *Marybeth Strobel* and EVP, Ad Sales & Partnerships *Greg Regis*, who will both be responsible for sales across the WBD portfolio. *Jon Diament* will head up the ad and partner strategy for WBD Sports and manage relationships and development with WBD's clients that are partners of the **NBA**, **NCAA**, **MLB** and **NHL**. Diament will also be the primary ad sales contact for internal stakeholders. The digital team will be led by *Ryan Gould* in a newly created position, where he'll steer the strategic direction of WBD's digital offerings like **Max** and **discovery+** while also overseeing the company's advanced advertising, programmatic sales and data strategy. *Sheereen Russell* will be tasked with leading the new client partnerships team that will focus on client development and partnership strategy with key advertisers across WBD's linear and digital portfolio, working closely with other divisions like theatrical, distribution, gaming and licensing. Russell will continue overseeing the inclusive ad sales solutions team as well. Integrated ad sales marketing will still be led by *Laura Galletta*, and *Robert Voltaggio* will remain at the top of the ad sales revenue, planning and operations for all U.S. networks and digital platforms. *Andrea Zapata* will continue leading ad sales research, measurement, data and insights for WBD's linear and digital brands and manage marketplace intelligence, category and client insights.

NEXSTAR LOOKING FOR AUDIENCE MEASUREMENT PARTNER

Nexstar is on the hunt for a new audience measurement partner. The company issued an open Request for Proposals as it seeks a partner "capable of providing data that accurately reflects the scale and power of the company's national and local media business." CRO *Michael Strober* said Nexstar doesn't think the current audience measurement methods accurately reflect its reach and effectiveness of local activation, emphasizing the need to accelerate the pace of innovation in cross-platform measurement for both national and local content. *Hanna Gryncwajg*, who was recently appointed as VP, Measurement Innovation, will lead the search and oversee the RFP process. Nexstar has

already worked with audience measurement companies like **VideoAmp** and **iSpot** earlier this year for linear and streaming audience data generated across its media platforms.

DISNEY PHONES SOME FRIENDS

Disney shares closed up 3.2% Monday after *Puck* [reported](#) that former lieutenants *Kevin Mayer* and *Tom Staggs* have been brought in as consultants on **ESPN** and the linear TV business. Mayer and Staggs now run the investment company **Candle Media**, but previously served as DTC Chairman and CFO, respectively. The media world is still talking about Disney CEO *Bob Iger's* [appearance](#) on **CNBC**, where he suggested linear properties weren't core to the business and that ESPN might seek a strategic partner.

COX MOBILE GETS THE GALAXY

The new **Samsung** Galaxy Z Flip5 and Galaxy Z Fold5 are now available to **Cox Mobile** customers in retail stores nationwide. The phones were unveiled last week in what's the fifth generation of Samsung's foldable Galaxy phones, which come with improved features like optimized battery life, versatile cameras that allow for hands-free photos and videos and more. The Z Fold5 is currently available for a retail price of \$1,199.99 (normal price being \$1,799.99) and the Z Flip5 goes for \$399.99 (down from \$999.99). Cox Mobile offers "Pay As You Gig" plans starting at \$15/GB and unlimited data for \$45/month.

NRBY, SERVICE ELECTRIC INK DEAL

Service Electric Cablevision is turning to **Nrby** to use its Nrby Platform for improved visibility into SECV's infrastructure assets, optimized operations and heightened subscriber experience. The platform will help SECV's ability to proactively mitigate service issues before they escalate into service calls. Nrby will also leverage its location intelligence and smart notifications to provide real-time insights into the status of SECV's infrastructure, thus letting the provider's plant and maintenance team work more efficiently.

AWARDS

ACA Connects presented its 2023 association awards during *The Independent Show*, with **Astound Broadband** Chief Commercial Officer *Patrick Knorr* receiving the ACA PAC Leadership Award for his work supporting the association's Political Action Committee. **Cable One** was honored with the ACA PAC Leadership Award, while **Calix** received the ACAC Partnership Award. **Mediacom's** *Theresa Sunde* was presented with **The Lyn Simpson Grassroots Spirit Award**, which celebrates individuals and companies that embody the passion and commitment that Simpson brought to the small operator community in her role as an ACAC founding member in the early 1990s. **NCTI** CEO *Stacey Slaughter* was presented with the Rob Shema Servant Leader Award for her dedication to serving the needs of ACAC members.