

Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Roundabouts: Viewers Connecting with Linear Via Streaming Options

For those of us overwhelmed by the amount of content available across platforms, that bloat isn't in any way imagined. Nielsen's 2023 State of Play report arrived Monday with data and insights from content solutions business unit **Gracenote**, and it found that content available to viewers in the U.S., U.K., Canada, Mexico and Germany has exploded to more than 2.7 million individual video programs. That growth has been spread across linear and streaming, but 86.7% of the content calls streaming platforms home.

With streaming offering more than ever, where do the opportunities lie for linear video providers? **Comscore** believes they come in meeting consumers where they are with easy-to-use streaming video options, and its 2023 State of Streaming report has the evidence to prove it.

When looking at the top 10 video services in May 2023 by hours per household, the top spot wasn't held by an SVOD. Instead, it was **Spectrum TV**, Charter's app allowing for streaming TV live or on demand, with 75.74 hours per household and an average of 4.34 hours per household watched per viewing day. It easily beat the competition with the closest rival being **YouTube.com** with 46.54 hours per household.

Spectrum TV wasn't alone with seven of the top 10 video services by intensity of engagement being ad-supported live streaming options or linear streaming options. Those include **Philo**, **Xfinity Stream** and **Sling TV**. That may be hard for some

to believe when cord-cutting is continuing to lead to a decline in linear subscribers, but it is a case of meeting consumers where they like to consume content.

"The reconciliation really is thinking about the fact that while linear as a traditional offering, as in through a set-top box, that share of hours was going down, but I can still consume linear content on other devices. I can have connected linear content effectively," Comscore VP Product Management **James Muldrow** said during a Tuesday webinar. "The idea that live linear is going down is reconciled by the fact that live linear on streaming is still garnering a lot of attention. And in the case of some of these companies, it is the largest component of their intensity as far as hours per household."

Of course, linear options are facing more competition than ever with the rise of FAST channels and ad-supported streaming plans, and that's not expected to stop any time soon. In May 2023, Nielsen found that 26% of all U.S. streaming minutes were spent on AVOD platforms while vMVPDs and MVPDs took 15% of the pie. But why are folks making streaming options their go-to? More often than not these days, it is for library or acquired content, not originals. During that May timeframe, 60% of time spent streaming in the U.S. was dedicated to programming that first aired on linear channels. Those trends have seemingly continued in recent months with "Suits," a legal drama that premiered on **USA Network** in 2011, dominating the **Netflix** viewership charts.

FAST services that focus on not only acquiring library content,



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but making decisions that will ultimately help them connect with a particular community could be what ultimately pushes a few services to the top of the food chain. When looking at the Hispanic community, Comscore found that those households declined in the number of hours viewed per household when it came to services that have introduced an ad-supported tier like Netflix or **Disney+**. But AVODs like **Pluto TV** and **Tubi** saw massive increases, and Muldrow credits that to the focus on programming that is targeted in nature. It also opens the door for innovation when it comes to how advertisers present campaigns to audiences and new ways to connect with specific groups.

“There are channels that may be specifically speaking to Hispanics on some of these services,” he said. “Overall, the fact that content availability can be more targeted and it’s free is something that is going to be able to present the opportunity for advertisers and content producers to be able to pair advertising with content.”

FCC STANDS BY ORIGINAL BROADBAND LABELS DECISION

The **FCC** has largely stood by its original broadband label rules, rejecting the majority of petitions asking the agency to reconsider or clarify certain requirements. The rules, adopted last year, require broadband providers to display labels at the point of sale with information about pricing, introductory rates, data allowances, speeds and links to further resources on network management, privacy policies and the Affordable Connectivity Program. There were some revisions and clarifications made largely to providers’ record-keeping requirements when directing consumers to a label on an alternative sales channel. Providers may also state “taxes included” when their pricing already incorporates taxes into the final calculations. The rules will go into effect following a review by the Office of Management and Budget. Following that, most providers will have to display the label within six months of approval. Providers with 100,000 or fewer subscriber lines will have an extended deadline of 12 months.

AUGUST RATINGS

Fox News came out on top of primetime and total-day ratings among cable nets for the month of August. It was the only network to eclipse the 2-million mark in prime with an average of 2.03 million viewers P2+. **MSNBC** found itself in second with 1.56 million, followed by **HGTV**’s 799,000, **ESPN**’s 732,000 and **CNN**’s 723,000. Fox News and MSNBC took the first and second spots in total day with 1.17 million and 952,000, respectively. MSNBC, however, claimed the top cable program of the month

in total viewers with “The Rachel Maddow Show.” Fellow news competitor CNN came third at 545,000, and HGTV (431,000) and ESPN (418,000) rounded the total-day top five. – **Spectrum News** averaged 1.8 million daily viewing households across linear and digital platforms in August. That’s more daily viewing households within Spectrum markets than the broadcast nets as well as Fox News, CNN and MSNBC.

RATINGS

Sunday’s Braves-Giants game had an average audience of 1.72 million viewers across **ESPN** and the alternate “KayRod Cast” on **ESPN2**. The telecasts peaked at 1.89 million viewers at 8:30pm. Through 26 **MLB** games on its platforms, ESPN is averaging 1.5 million viewers—up from 1.48 million at this point last year. – Part 1 of “Ahsoka” checked in as the most-watched **Disney+** title this past week with 14 million views. New episodes drop Tuesdays at 6pm PT. – The 2023 Little League Baseball World Series had its most-watched tournament on **ESPN** platforms since 2015. Over 38 games, the LLBWS averaged 1.08 million viewers, a 22% improvement YOY. The tournament had double-digit increases in M18-34, M18-49, M25-54, P18-34, P18-49 and P25-54. The championship game on Sunday averaged 2.94 million viewers on **ABC**, peaking at 4.06 million at 5:15pm. – **ESPN**’s “First Take” made it 13 straight months of YOY viewership growth. In August, the program had a YOY increase of 21% after averaging 391,000 viewers. – Notre Dame’s season-opening 42-3 win over Navy scored a total audience delivery of 3.81 million viewers on **NBC**, **Peacock** and **NBC Sports** digital platforms. Peacock and NBC Sports platforms had an average minute audience of 251,000 viewers, making it Notre Dame’s most-streamed game ever (excluding Peacock exclusive games).

ESPN DEALINGS

ESPN penned a theatrical distribution agreement with **Theater Sports Network** to broadcast **ACC** football games, New Year’s Six Bowl contests and the **College Football Playoffs** at movie theaters in the U.S. The agreement includes 75 games over the course of the college football season, with ACC games airing on ESPN platforms being available for TSN distribution in away teams’ markets or in both home and away markets for neutral-site games. TSN is teaming up with the global cloud-based delivery platform **MetaMedia** to be its live-streaming distribution partner. – It’s not just the Power-5 conferences making broadcast moves. **ESPN** and the **Missouri Valley Football Conference** agreed to a multi-media rights extension through the 2029 season. A minimum of nine MVFC games will be broadcast on ESPN, ESPN2 or ESPN3. The conference will also continue its “Game of the Week” digital package on **ESPN+**, which spotlights eight MVFC games total

throughout the season.

DIRECTV KICKS OFF BIG TEN SPONSORSHIP

Big Ten football gets underway this weekend, and **DirecTV** is getting in on the excitement. The MVPD signed a multi-year sponsorship agreement with the Big Ten and **Big Ten Network**. DirecTV will be the presenting sponsor for all-access content across football, men's and women's basketball, volleyball and other sports through the DirecTV-B1G All-Access platform. That'll include features on the Iowa women's basketball team traveling to Italy and Croatia, iconic football rivalries and Volleyball Day at Nebraska. The sponsorship also entails DirecTV becoming a supporting partner of the Big Ten's DE&I initiatives and a presenting sponsor for at least one Big Ten championship event in each year of the partnership.

MIDCO OFFLOADS TOWERS

Midco sold its portfolio of towers to **K2 Towers** as the provider continues to hone in on its broadband business. The terms of the transaction weren't disclosed. The deal enhances K2's geographic footprint in Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wisconsin. Southern Tower Consulting represented Midco.

BREEZELINE GIVES INFRASTRUCTURE A BOOST

Breezeline gave its fiber-broadband infrastructure a boost to help enhance performance and its customers' online experience. The provider deployed advanced technology within the infrastructure thanks to a recently opened data center in Chicago, which was established alongside the IT solutions provider **CoreSite**. Breezeline will utilize CoreSite's peering service to interconnect with networks and exchange IP traffic, while also leveraging cloud and content onramps for connectivity to major cloud and content providers. The two companies already work together with existing deployments at CoreSite's data centers in Miami, Atlanta and D.C.

REDBOX ADDS TVOD TO PERKS

Redbox is adding its TVOD platform to its Redbox Perks loyalty program, allowing customers to earn points by renting or purchasing movies from a Redbox kiosk. Those points could then be used for discounted or free rentals from future purchases, and new members of the rewards program can get a free one-night rental at a kiosk or select \$2 off a movie rental via the Redbox streaming app.

AWARDS

The 2023 **Google Cloud** Industry Solution Technology Partner of the Year Award for Media & Entertainment was awarded to **Quickplay** for a second consecutive year. Google Cloud's partner awards

honor companies with a large impact and customer success within the Google Cloud ecosystem. Quickplay was recognized for its acceleration of significant joint customer adoption of OTT solutions across multiple regions and categories, collaboration with Google Cloud to establish new OTT capabilities and developing more opportunities for viewer engagement and monetization.

DOING GOOD

Plume's annual PlumeStrong Cycling Challenge will be held from September 4-8. Plume employees will be joined by industry partners as well as two-time Tour de France winner *Tadej Pogacar* as they cycle through Switzerland and France, raising proceeds for children impacted by the earthquake in Turkey and Syria back in February. Plume is aiming to double the €250,000 raised in last year's event to assist in building a school in one of the regions most affected by the earthquake.

PROGRAMMING

NBCUniversal will have a record amount of programming for the 2024 Paralympic Games. Over 140 hours of TV coverage will be aired across **NBC, USA** and **CNBC**, which includes six hours of primetime coverage on NBC and airings of every competition day on USA and CNBC. **Peacock** will have approximately 1,500 hours of live coverage across all 22 sports in the event. The Paralympics will take place in Paris on Aug. 28-Sept. 8 of next year.

OBITUARIES

The industry lost a couple of heavyweights recently. Attorney *Peter Jay Bernbaum* passed away Aug. 24 following a nine-month battle with pancreatic cancer. He was 74. Bernbaum had more than 30 years of experience, representing businesses and individuals in various industries, including providing counsel for the launch of new cable networks and the development of emerging new media. He served as special outside counsel to **NBC, CNBC** and **MSNBC** and also was well versed in the complicated negotiations for retransmission consent. Bernbaum is survived by his wife of 43 years, *Tamar*, his children, *Emily (Jay)* and *Eric*, and his grandchildren, *Caroline* and *Cameron*. In lieu of flowers, the family asks to please consider donating to any no-kill animal shelter or dog rescue. On Aug. 18, *Sally Kinsman* passed away in Bothwell, WA, at age 78. A cable system designer, she was the first woman elected to the **SCTE** board of directors in 1983 and the first woman to receive the SCTE Member of the Year Award in 1986. In 2010, she was the first woman inducted into the SCTE Hall of Fame. In 1999 while with General Instrument, Kinsman received the Women in Technology Award by **The WICT Network, SCTE** and **Cablefax**, which acknowledges the achievements of one woman who has demonstrated outstanding personal and professional growth and significantly contributed to the cable telecommunications industry.