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WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Waiting Game: DirecTV Stream Getting CW Back, Disney-Spectrum Battling

Sinclair and The CW Network announced a major affiliation renewal Thursday, but the biggest winner of all may actually be DirecTV.

DirecTV lost 159 Nexstar stations on July 2, but the blackout widened in the days following as CW Network programming on Sinclair owned and managed local stations in 21 markets became unavailable on DirecTV Stream, the company's streaming service.

Nexstar has owned the CW Network since October, but it says it didn't force the blackout. In comments to the FCC, Nexstar said DirecTV's agreement with The CW authorizing the streaming of its programming on DirecTV Stream expired in November.

Under the new deal, Sinclair won't have to black out that CW Network content to any DirecTV Stream customers, including those in the markets that have been impacted since July 12. The content is scheduled to return to those viewers Friday.

"We're certainly pleased that Sinclair seems to have seized back the right to provide its viewers, and our customers, the programming they should have always retained in the first place," a DirecTV spokesperson told CFX.

Nexstar and DirecTV continue to be blacked out as we move into the college football season, and DirecTV is updating its communications with viewers on alternative

ways to watch their favorite teams.

"For instance, Sunday night's feature game between #5 LSU and #8 Florida State remains available to anyone temporarily without usual access to an ABC station," its TV Promise website now says. "The game is available for free via the local ABC affiliate's digital broadcast signal, using an antenna, and potentially streaming at the station, network, or ESPN website." DirecTV also encouraged fans to use its zip code locator to find out whether their teams are impacted and if there are potential alternatives to remain connected.

While DirecTV was celebrating, Spectrum customers were taking to Reddit and Twitter to voice their concerns of a potential blackout of Disney networks on their linear video lineups. Disney-owned channels that could have been impacted included ESPN networks, SEC Network, ACC Network, Longhorn Network, FX networks, Freeform, National Geographic networks, Disney Channel, Disney Junior, Disney XD and Baby TV. Distribution of seven local ABC stations was also on the negotiating table.

The deadline for a new agreement was 5pm ET, and the Disney nets were still available for Spectrum customers at our deadline. Companies often enter into short-term extensions in an effort to find common ground before taking action. On a customer-facing website, Spectrum claimed that the issue at the heart of the dispute was Disney asking for an excessive increase in carriage fees.



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“They also want to limit our ability to provide greater customer choice in programming packages forcing you to take and pay for channels you may not want,” Spectrum said. “The rising cost of programming is the single greatest factor in higher cable TV prices, and we are fighting hard to hold the line on programming rates imposed on us by companies like Disney.”

Disney Entertainment said it was committed to working with Charter to reach market-based rates and terms. “We are optimistic that we can reach a new deal and continue to provide their Spectrum TV customers with access to our unrivaled live sporting events and news coverage plus kids, family and general entertainment programming,” the company said in a statement.

Wednesday. “If you look at our schedule today, on August 30, it looks pretty darn good ... I hope the NFL works with us if one of our games doesn’t pan out the way it looks today on August 30 when we get there.” Former NFL player and current analyst *Cris Collinsworth* echoed that sentiment, adding that it’s beneficial for fans to get the most out of their viewing experience. “At least if you’re watching at 1pm or 4pm you can always flip around and find a different game if the one you’re watching is not very good, but if they put a bad game in primetime, you feel a little cheated. There’s only one game on, there’s nowhere to go,” Collinsworth said.

NFL BROADCASTERS GET FLEXIBLE

We’re a week away from the 2023-2024 NFL season kicking off, and the big story for broadcasters heading into this year is additional flex scheduling options. Monday Night Football on ESPN will now be able to flex games at the league’s discretion from Weeks 12-17, and Thursday Night Football on Prime Video can use flex scheduling up to twice between Weeks 13-17. Sunday Night Football has had flex scheduling capabilities since NBC obtained the timeslot’s rights in 2006, but SNF Coordinating Producer *Rob Hyland* hopes the tentatively set schedule won’t need any changes come kickoff. “I think the landscape has gotten obviously more competitive, but we will do the absolute same job with any game on our schedule,” Hyland said on a media call

STARRY EMERGES FROM CHAPTER 11 BANKRUPTCY

Starry is leaving Chapter 11 bankruptcy six months after its initial filing, the provider announced Thursday. It believes that following a restructuring of the company’s debt and a strengthening of its balance sheet, it has a clear pathway to profitability. “I’m immensely proud of all of our employees, who kept their focus on our customers, our network and on delivering an internet service experience that far outshines our ‘big internet’ competitors,” CEO *Alex Moulle-Berteaux* said in a statement. Starry will now be a privately-held company and shares of its common stock will halt trading on the over-the-counter market effective immediately. Starry’s board of directors will also now include Moulle-Berteaux and Co-Founder/Former CEO *Chet Kanojia*.

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RATINGS

The Las Vegas Aces vs New York Liberty game Monday was the most-watched **WNBA** regular-season contest on **ESPN2** in five years. The broadcast averaged 328,000 viewers and peaked at 357,000. – **Hallmark Channel** was the No. 1 entertainment cable network in weekend primetime among households, W18+, P18+ and total viewers throughout its “Summer Nights” programming event. It reached 20 million unduplicated viewers over the course of August, with five original movie premieres delivering the most-watched program every Saturday in August among households, W18+, P18+ and total viewers. Hallmark was also the top entertainment cable net in weekend total day for the month among households and total viewers.

CARRIAGE

Sinclair inked a multi-year renewal for **The CW Network** in 35 markets. The deal includes 10 markets where Sinclair provides sales and services to their respective CW-affiliated stations, and starting September 1, Sinclair will launch CW on two new affiliate stations: KOMO-TV in Seattle and WPNT-TV in Pittsburgh. Both stations already air **LIV Golf**, but will add the CW’s entire programming offering. – **Cineverse** is partnering with **Maverick Entertainment Group** to launch **Maverick Black Cinema** on the Cineverse streaming service. The channel will bring films such as “Take Me To Amazing,” “Two Wolves” and “Candy.”

FIBER FRENZY

Altafiber is directing \$600 million in new funding toward the continued construction of its fiber networks in incumbent and expansion markets in Ohio, Kentucky, Indiana and Hawaii. The money was raised by existing investors, supporting co-investors and Macquarie Asset Management and Areas Management, and will help altafiber with its plans to expand its network to around 400,000 homes outside its incumbent territories. Altafiber expects to complete construction of fiber to every single-family unit in Greater Cincinnati by the end of 2023 and the building of Hawaii’s statewide network by the end of 2027.

ON THE CIRCUIT

The Southern California Cable Reunion is set for October 7 at the Santa Monica Brew Works in Santa Monica, California. Hosted by **Bob Gold & Associates** and **Bob Green**, the event will run from 1-4pm PT. Tickets are available for \$50/person until September 15. All net proceeds will go to the **Syndeo Institute at The Cable Center**.

DOING GOOD

Comcast NBCUniversal is donating \$250,000 toward relief and recovery efforts in Florida following Hurricane Idalia. The donation includes a \$200,000 contribution and \$25,000 worth

of advertising time for PSAs to support Volunteer Florida’s Florida Disaster Relief Fund. An additional \$25,000 will go toward the Second Harvest Food Bank of the Big Bend. Comcast also removed data thresholds for Xfinity Mobile and Comcast Business Mobile customers and is eliminating data overage charges for its “By the Gig” customers through September 12.

PROGRAMMING

Investigation Discovery will have a two-hour documentary chronicling the life and impact of *Matthew Shepard*, a gay college student who was murdered nearly 25 years ago. “The Matthew Shepard Story: An American Hate Crime” will premiere Oct. 9 at 9pm. – **Fox News’ Stuart Varney** and **Dana Perino** will team up with **Univision’s Ilija Calderón** to co-moderate the second Republican presidential primary debate of the 2024 election. **Fox Business** will air the debate Sept. 27 at 9pm from Simi Valley, California, while **Univision** will have it in Spanish. – The **LPGA Tour’s** Portland Classic starts today. Coverage will air from 6-9pm on **Golf Channel** and **Peacock** each day until the final round on Sunday. – *Sal Iacono*, better known as “Cousin Sal,” is coming to **FanDuel TV** and **FanDuel TV+** with two new shows. He’ll preview upcoming college football and **NFL** weekends as host of “Cousin Sal’s Winning Weekend,” which will air Fridays at 9pm starting Sept. 8. Then, starting Sept. 10, he’ll be a regular host of a weekly 11am NFL pregame program “Ringer Wise Guys.” – It’s never too early to start celebrating Halloween. **Freeform** is bringing back its “31 Nights of Halloween” programming event for the 25th time. It’ll start Oct. 1 at 7am with “Mrs. Doubtfire” and over the course of the month will showcase classics like “Hocus Pocus,” “Monsters, Inc.,” “The Nightmare Before Christmas” and “The Addams Family.” – **AMC Networks** will have a series of fan screenings for the upcoming premiere of “The Walking Dead: Daryl Dixon.” **AMCN** is partnering with BeyondFest, Alamo Drafthouse and Rooftop Films to bring the screenings to Brooklyn and Santa Monica, California, on Sept 5, then to Brooklyn, Manhattan, Austin, Chicago and LA on Sept. 6. Additionally, **AMCN** launched a sweepstakes where fans can win a trip to where the series was filmed in France. – *Blake Burman* will become the new permanent moderator of **NewsNation’s** political program “The Hill.” The former **Fox Business** reporter will begin his new role Tuesday. – The first race of this year’s **NASCAR** Cup Series Playoffs is set for Sunday at 6pm on **USA**. “Countdown to Green” will lead into the Cook Out Southern 500 at 5:30pm and post-race coverage will follow after the race’s conclusion. On the IndyCar side, the Grand Prix of Portland will air Sunday at 3pm on **NBC** and stream on **Peacock**.

PEOPLE

TelevisaUnivision picked *Daniel Coronell* as the next President, Univision News after spending two years away from the company. Coronell first joined Univision News in 2011 as VP/News Director, eventually becoming President, News in 2016. *María Martínez-Guzmán* will remain as EVP, Univision News.

PROGRAMMER'S PAGE

ID Is Keeping Things Confidential

Crime show fanatics who want to dig below the surface of an investigation will want to take a peek at **Investigation Discovery's** "Crime Scene Confidential." The show returns for its second season Wednesday at 9pm, with *Alina Burroughs*—a former crime scene investigator in Orange County, Florida—back as the host to provide clarity around forensic evidence and what it means pertaining to an investigation. This season, ID's SVP, Production and Development *Winona Meringolo* tells **CFX** the show wanted to further emphasize the "confidential" part of its title by bringing the audience deeper into each crime scene. It follows that notion from the start as Season 2 starts with a case from Mansfield, Ohio, where in January 1998 a single mother's body was found frozen and strangled to death. In the episode, Burroughs not only hones in on two microscopic fibers to find the killer, but it even features her in a one-on-one conversation with the woman's alleged killer. "We want viewers to see her in action—whether that is her getting into the cold river water where a body is found to determine just how icy the temperature is or scuba diving to the bottom of the lake to better understand how a crime unfolded," Meringolo said. "We think one of the most exciting aspects of this new season is Alina really showcasing her forensic expertise and showcasing how a CSI really works on the ground." Over the course of the season, more areas of forensics will be put on display including fire, odontology and water. One aspect that Burroughs will delve into is how far technology and protocols have changed since these investigations first happened. "In many cases she is explaining how science changed from the time of the murder to the point of an appeal or recent changes and points out what should have been tested but wasn't," Meringolo said. – *Noah Ziegler*

REVIEWS

"Life Below Zero" season premiere, 9pm, Labor Day, **National Geographic**. With few exceptions, TV series don't run 10 years without having appeal. Evidence is "Life Below Zero," which debuted in 2013. It remains among National Geographic's best. The premise is basic: human vs. nature, a theme repeated often. Appropriately for Labor Day, the season premiere centers on Alaskans' work as winter beckons. *Sue Aikens* is hunting caribou. Recovering from serious injuries, *Jessie Holmes* is preparing his dog team for competition, but also testing himself. In Thorne Bay, where it's a balmy 34 degrees, *Cole Sturgis* is fishing for salmon and repairing his historic float house, rocking gently (for now) on the ocean. In Huslia, *Ricko DeWilde* finds ice fishing is getting trickier owing to global warming. Emmy-winning camerawork and effective narration make Life a terrific escape. – Notable: It's unlikely *Bob Barker* thought his appearances on "Match Game" would outlive him. Yet that's exactly what's on tap Saturday. A fitting kickoff for Labor Day Weekend, **Game Show Network** is mounting a full workday (9am-5pm) Barker marathon. But it's not Barker hosting "The Price is Right." Instead, it's Barker in the unusual (for him) role of celebrity participant in a game. And Barker was good at Match Game. In fact, he was so good, at times Barker assumed the prestigious *Richard Dawson* chair. – *Seth Arenstein*

BASIC CABLE		
P2+ PRIME RANKINGS*		
(08/21/23-08/27/23)		
MON-SUN	MC	MC
	US	US AA
	AA%	(000)
FNC	0.880	2747
MSNBC	0.496	1548
ESPN	0.320	999
HGTV	0.269	841
CNN	0.263	821
INSP	0.221	690
TLC	0.219	682
HALL	0.213	666
NFL	0.207	647
USA	0.191	598
FOOD	0.171	533
TBSC	0.163	507
ID	0.159	498
HIST	0.159	497
DISC	0.159	495
TVLAND	0.145	451
HMM	0.122	381
A&E	0.117	365
BRAVO	0.116	361
NWSMX	0.115	359
TNT	0.110	344
WETV	0.102	318
AMC	0.101	316
LIFE	0.101	314
BET	0.089	278
GSN	0.087	273
FBN	0.084	263
FX	0.083	258
NAN	0.082	255
COM	0.080	249
OXY	0.078	242
APL	0.074	230
FETV	0.072	223
ADSM	0.069	215
SNDNCE	0.067	208

*P2+ L+SD rankers are based on national Nielsen numbers, not coverage.

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