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WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

WICT Conference: Industry Faces Sea Change on Video, Regulation & More

Everyone at **The WICT Network's** Leadership Conference Monday could agree on one thing—the industry is in a time of immense change and uncertainty, and how you handle it matters. No one is immune from feeling its impacts, but the ability to embrace change may make navigating the treacherous waters a little easier.

On the video side, **A+E Networks** EVP, Distribution and Marketing *Jane Rice* said distribution deals have become harder than ever with conversations around windowing and digital rights taking over the bulk of the time.

“We’re certainly linear-centric, but we do want to preserve the ability to monetize our library content. It’s no different than years ago how we would have done so with DVDs, etc. We’re just doing it in a digital fashion,” Rice said during a panel discussion. “I think that when we’re looking at distribution deals, it’s really imperative that we stay creative. I think that we all saw that with the recent **Disney/ESPN/Charter** deal.”

She believes carriage negotiations could become a little smoother if programmers and distributors are able to find that common ground that preserves the traditional video business for as long as possible while also exploring new opportunities. For instance, A+E Networks has an entire team working in the FAST space and unlocking the value of library content through those channels. At the same time, folks like **Comcast** and **Charter** are looking into it with ventures like **Xumo**, to be unveiled later this

year. “We’re excited about the possibilities there,” Rice said.

The media, video and broadband ecosystems are also receiving plenty of interest from lawmakers, and that attention comes with positive and negative consequences. On one hand, more federal and state dollars are being set aside for broadband deployment and digital equity than ever before. On the other, Congress is in the process of examining a plethora of issues and any stance lawmakers take will have huge effects.

Charter SVP, Federal Affairs *Rachel Welch* highlighted a few areas to watch, including the interest in placing the same regulatory rules that apply to MVPDs to streaming platforms offering live programming. She also encouraged everyone to keep an eye on privacy legislation, including the Kids Online Safety Act. The bill puts the onus on online platforms to prevent and mitigate certain dangers to minors, including advertisements for certain products that are illegal for minors to use. It was originally focused on user-generated content, but depending on how some definitions are written, Welch warned that it could potentially also cover streaming and linear content.

“They’re trying to do the right thing and protect children, but it could upend the entire business model and the advertising that we place on our platforms,” Welch said. “There’s just so much intervention, so much engagement from policymakers. I think they think our industry is really fun and interesting. But depending on how they engage and how they define things, they could really either help us or mess it up.”

Through all the change and potential disruption, companies and

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their executive teams are doing their best to assuage employee fears and encourage a culture of collaboration and transparency. Few know more about this than **Warner Bros. Discovery** EVP/General Counsel *Savalle Sims*, the person responsible for obtaining regulatory clearances around the globe that allowed the Discovery-Warner Bros. merger to ultimately close. She encouraged everyone holding the reins during the time of the merger to embrace change and examine how they could take the best of the two cultures and bring those to life at Warner Bros. Discovery.

That's a tough task at a time when people are extremely unsettled not just from a massive merger, but from significant shifts in the industry at large. "We're going through changes in how the ecosystem fundamentally works and we're going through a time of increased regulatory intervention and change not just internationally, which I've been experiencing for years in my role, but also here within the United States as well," Sims said. "It's really how we respond to that change, how we adapt to that change and how we equip our teams to be best prepared to meet it that I think is really important."

One of the sweeping positive changes that came in 2020 was an explosion in conversations around DEI and the hiring of chief diversity officers to ensure conversations around equity were happening internally. There's some concern now that those internal efforts to talk about societal inequities from a corporate perspective are slowing down or declining as those roles have seemingly been more vulnerable to layoffs industrywide.

Comcast is trying to keep the conversation going through a number of initiatives, bringing in external voices through its monthly DEI speaker series and highlighting employees during a companywide DEI Day. This year's event saw more than 45,000 employees tune into the broadcast with approximately 30 stories from Comcast associates about how they're promoting DEI initiatives every day being highlighted during the program.

"When people feel a part of something that's bigger than just themselves, they want to do more. They want to lean in a little bit harder, they want to really elevate the work that we're doing. That's what's key to us," said Comcast Cable SVP/Chief Diversity Officer *Loren Hudson*.

DIRECTV, NEXSTAR STRIKE DEAL

DirecTV and **Nexstar's** two-and-a-half month blackout has come to an end, but they aren't burying the hatchet. While the two signed a new multi-year retransmission consent deal Monday for 176 Nexstar-owned stations and cable network **NewsNation**, DirecTV isn't dropping its federal lawsuit accusing Nexstar of antitrust violations for its shared service agreements with **Mission Broadcasting** and **White Knight**. Both broadcaster's stations have been off DirecTV since October and remain off today. This wasn't quite the

precedent setting deal that **Charter-Disney** represented, but it's still an important one. DirecTV showed it wasn't afraid to lose the largest broadcaster in the U.S. for an extended period that included Week 1 of the NFL Season, the start of college football and MLB's Home Run Derby. There were positive signs that a deal was near in the early morning hours Sunday when the two had made enough progress to announce the temporary return of Nexstar stations ahead of the day's gridiron action as they continued negotiations. As for the White Knight/Mission lawsuit, DirecTV also has an informal complaint pending at the **FCC**, the same agency that granted its good faith complaint in 2019 against nine broadcast station owners with **Sinclair** shared service agreements.

JUST PUBLISHED: CABLEFAX'S DIVERSITY ISSUE

Cablefax: The Magazine's Diversity [issue](#) made its debut Monday for the kickoff of the industry's annual **Diversity Week**. Along with our annual must-read Diversity List honoring the influential multi-ethnic executives in the industry, the magazine features the Pride List, recognizing outstanding LGBTQ+ leaders. The magazine also features three D&I Champions—**NBCUniversal's** *Cesar Conde*, **Onyx Collective's** *Tara Duncan* and **Warner Bros. Discovery's** *Channing Dungey*—as well as an impressive trio of Thrivers Under 30 along with our Organization Awards for companies that are advancing diversity and inclusion. "The executives and organizations featured in our Diversity issue haven't been afraid to step up, speak out and spark change. As the industry asks itself how to ensure that 2020 was indeed a turning point for DEI, these are the leaders to listen to," said Cablefax Editorial Director *Amy Maclean*. Visit [CablefaxDiversity.com](#) to view the digital issue and read individual profiles. We look forward to raising a glass to celebrate all of the 2023 honorees during **NAMIC's** reception Tuesday evening.

WICT CONFERENCE NOTEBOOK

A lot of companies are talking the talk when it comes to Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) strategies and corporate social responsibility, but how are the ones that are walking the walk making it happen? **Comcast** SVP, Corporate Strategy and Environmental Sustainability *Sara Cronenwett* said during a breakout session at **The WICT Network's Leadership Conference** that what works for the operator is to ensure its impact goals are aligned with its business goals. "We do that not to be self-serving, but because it's the way that we can most authentically engage and have the most or the fastest impact," she said. In its cable division, Comcast has introduced more digital technology and customer service tools designed to enhance the care experience. As a result, the operator doesn't have to roll as many trucks, and

all of those gas savings add up on the balance sheet and when Comcast thinks about its environmental footprint. “We’ve saved 9.5 million gallons of gas through these efforts as well as others like fuel efficiency, telematics and piloting electric vehicles,” she said. “It’s another one of those triple wins that we try to find.” When asked about how DEI initiatives and corporate social responsibility fit together, **ESPN VP, Corporate Citizenship Kevin Martinez** said there is a convergence between the efforts now that hasn’t been there in the past. It is forcing every department within media companies to ask not if they should be investing in DEI, but why they weren’t doing so already. ESPN has taken a meaningful look at itself in recent years, asking itself why it wasn’t investing in the space when 60% of elite athletes in the U.S. were people of color, primarily black or brown. “There is room at the table and there must be room at the table,” he said. “That’s my charge—to keep moving forward in a meaningful way.”

HOUSTON RSN COULD TAKE OFF

First it was the Pittsburgh Penguins acquiring **AT&T SportsNet Pittsburgh**, and the next step in **Warner Bros. Discovery’s** RSN exit could be coming together in Houston. According to local station **KHOU**, a trademark was filed by Houston Sports Network on July 6 for the [name and logo](#) of “Space City Home Network.” The [filing](#) says the network’s purpose is “Streaming audiovisual and multimedia content in the field of sports via a global computer network and the internet” and “Telecommunications services, namely, transmission of voice, data, audio, video, graphics by means of telephone, telegraphic, cable and satellite transmission broadcasting services in the field of sports.” The potential new RSN would broadcast Rockets and Astros games. While it’s unclear who specifically is behind the Houston Sports Network entity, the address listed in the trademark filing is the same one as the Rockets’ home arena.

RATINGS

The ratings are in for the first Thursday Night Football game as **Prime Video** enters its second season as the event’s exclusive rights holder. The Eagles’ 34-28 win over the Vikings scored an average of 16.6 million viewers across all media platforms, according to **Nielsen’s** custom integrated live streaming report, making it the most-streamed **NFL** game in history. It should be noted that before the season Nielsen announced it would incorporate data from streaming services for live programming, but later put those plans on hold after failing to get approval from the Media Ratings Council. According to Nielsen’s panel-only national TV ratings, the stream was up 16% in total viewers over the comparable game in 2022. The game peaked with 17 million viewers during the 9:15-9:30pm window.

PROGRAMMING

It’s never too early to celebrate Christmas at **Great American**

Family. The network’s annual “Great American Christmas” event returns Oct. 20 with 20 holiday-themed movies running around the clock. Premiere dates are still to come, but movies making their debut during the event include “A Christmas Blessing” starring Lori Loughlin, “A Royal Christmas Holiday” and “Peppermint & Postcards.” – **Duff Goldman** signed a new multi-year, multi-project deal with **Food Network**. Goldman has starred in series such as “Ace of Cakes” and “Cake Masters,” and is involved in the upcoming series “The Elf on the Shelf: Sweet Showdown” which premieres later this year.

DIVERSITY WEEK BEGINS

Diversity Week festivities began Monday with **The WICT Network’s** 2023 Leadership Conference getting underway, coming just at the right time as the media and business world grapple with rapid technological advances and how they interact with company operations. Artificial intelligence is a focal point of this year’s Conference, even inspiring the theme of “Co-Create the Future.” **Maria Brennan**, The WICT Network’s President/CEO, told **CFX** the theme is a reflection of how AI can spark creativity and new insights—things that are always in mind at each Leadership Conference. “It’s an ongoing development, but it seems now that it is inevitable that AI will have a tremendous impact on the workplace of the future, and we wanted to help our stakeholders stay ahead of the curve and prepare to integrate it into their professional journeys,” she said. Brennan hopes the Conference and Diversity Week doings will lead to businesses seeing the benefits of having diverse and inclusive leadership, which has taken growing importance as of late as companies make cuts to DEI positions. “Numbers don’t lie—it’s been demonstrated empirically that a focus on diversity in organizations increases innovation, profitability, recruitment, retention, employee satisfaction and more,” Brennan said. “Data also shows that Gen Zers look to join organizations that reflect their values and demonstrate a commitment to DEI.” – **NAMIC’s** 37th [Annual Conference](#) kicks off with a lunch Tuesday featuring HR exec and best-selling author Steve Pemberton followed by a 2pm general session featuring NBC News anchor Lester Holt. At 7pm, there’s a reception honoring Cablefax’s 2023 Diversity and Pride list. Day two begins at 9am with filmmaker Will Packer taking the stage. – Don’t forget the **Kaitz Dinner**, celebrating its 40th year Wednesday night. New this year is a silent auction that will take place during the opening and closing receptions. Proceeds further support the Kaitz Foundation’s fundraising efforts and support of ChangeMaker Honorees.

PEOPLE

Meena Soleiman was upped to SVP, Technical Operations and Engineering for **Comcast Cable’s** Northeast Division. Soleiman, a 20-year Comcast vet, will oversee technical operations, engineering, and the residential and commercial construction teams across 14 northeastern states from Maine through Virginia.

GUEST COLUMNIST

Harnessing the Power of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion for Lasting Progress



Maria Brennan

Welcome to Diversity Week 2023! For the next week we will collectively pursue the newest business strategies and industry innovations, and we will share the latest workplace diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) tactics.

In the pursuit of building more inclusive societies, businesses and organizations around the world are waking up to the power of embracing DEI. Recognizing that diverse perspectives add immense value to organizations, leaders are now prioritizing efforts to create a more equitable and inclusive environment where every individual can thrive, irrespective of their similarities and differences.

Research and numerous success stories highlight the plethora of benefits that gender diversity gives companies. Those that champion an inclusive workplace culture statistically see improved teamwork, increased productivity, enhanced creativity and more sustainable growth. By bringing together individuals with a variety of backgrounds, experiences, and ideas, organizations can tap into a wealth of talent and gain an edge in an otherwise fiercely competitive global marketplace vying for the best talent.

Gender diversity is not just a matter of ticking boxes, but rather an opportunity to challenge conventional thinking, dismantle biases and foster innovation. True parity requires a commitment to cultivating equal opportunities for everyone by confronting socio-cultural barriers head-on. By creating a level playing field, organizations are empowering individuals and teams to contribute their full potential, resulting in overall success.

Equity is another crucial aspect that complements diversity. It involves being conscious of and addressing historical imbalances and systemic discrimination that disproportionately affects certain groups. Taking steps to rectify

these imbalances leads to better representation, enabling individuals to fulfill their capabilities and aspirations, free from any form of bias or discrimination. Embracing equity ensures that organizations truly value every individual's contribution, liberating them from deeply-rooted limitations.

Inclusion plays a pivotal role in this transformative journey. It encompasses the need for actively listening, respecting and valuing the perspectives of diverse individuals. Organizations that foster a culture of belonging provide an environment where everyone feels seen, heard, and acknowledged. By encouraging diverse ideas and participation at all levels, inclusive workplaces become hubs of collaboration, allowing for a broader range of thought and enabling more effective problem solving and decision-making.

As we collectively move forward, it is crucial for stakeholders to understand that measurement matters. Otherwise, we might anecdotally decide that things look just fine. The AIM | PAR Workforce DEI Survey, led by The WICT Network and NAMIC, underwritten by the Walter Kaitz Foundation and deployed by PwC, provides critical, empirical data showing industry leaders how talent is recruited and retained and flowing through an organization. Companies that participate in the survey receive rich, confidential data comparing their DEI metrics to other industry organizations and other business sectors.

Embracing gender diversity, equity and inclusion is not an option; it is an obligation to create a fairer and more progressive global society. Only by harnessing the power of diverse ideas, experiences and perspectives can we truly unlock the immense potential within each individual and pave the way for a brighter future.

– Maria E. Brennan, CAE, is the President & CEO of The WICT Network: Empowering Women in Media, Entertainment and Technology, a 10,000 member global nonprofit.

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