

Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Tug of War: Tensions Between Programmers, Creatives Top of Mind at NAMIC

The **SAG-AFTRA** and **WGA** strikes continue to rage on, and while the hope is that the efforts result in better deals for all members, there are potentially catastrophic impacts that could be coming with the stoppage in content creation in Hollywood. During the opening general session of **NAMIC's** 37th Annual Conference Wednesday, **Will Packer Productions** CEO Will Packer said those that will be hit the hardest are those working behind the scenes or supplying craft services that often work paycheck to paycheck.

"The long-term effect of that, I fear, is that there will be a recalibration in the industry which is necessary... and I think that there will probably be less content being made. So what does that mean in an industry that already does not have enough diverse storytellers, writers, producers, teamsters, grips and actors?" Packer said.

He believes that constriction in the amount of content being made will adversely impact those diverse groups trying to break their way into Hollywood. That doesn't mean there won't be any diversity in the programming being released, it will just be that much harder for new entrants. Storytellers that are telling stories, that know the importance of making sure that content coming out probably reflects the actual world, I think those people will continue to succeed," he said.

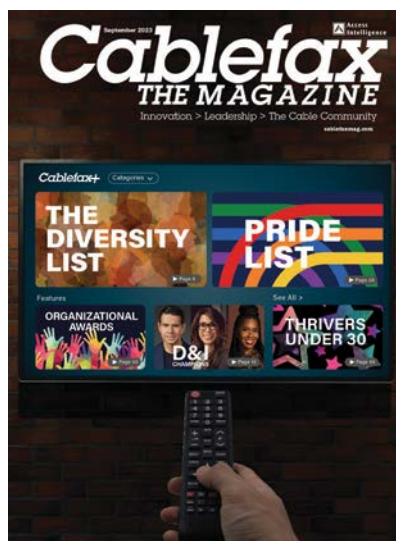
There's been a friction between the creatives and the studios as writers and actors demand job security, stronger pay and

protections from new technology like AI, and the breakdowns in communication between both sides of the business have been many. At a later panel featuring executives from the programming side of the business, **REVOLT Studios** President/Head of News and Docs *Monique Chenault* said one of her greatest challenges working at various networks has been that not all executives have come from a lengthy production background. She's been on both sides of the business, and now that she is in a position of leadership at a network, Chenault is doing her best to try to correct the parts that she struggled with when she was a producer. But misunderstanding and miscommunication from folks on both sides of the business can get in the way of progress.

"We always should be empowering the creatives. These are the storytellers, the shapers of perspective in this world," she said. "But a lot of the time, they don't have the information that they need to understand what's going on just with the logistics or the financial side."

Chenault often finds that being able to break down what is going on at the business in production terms creates a far more harmonious relationship between producers and the network, and she's in a unique position where she is able to take a step back and understand the challenges of both sides.

"I have to check myself because producers always want to take risks because there's not a lot of consequences for them," she said. "But as executives, you're also protecting the brand just so we all can have a place to work tomorrow."



Congratulations 2023 Diversity & Pride List Honorees!

The Cablefax team is thrilled to announce the Honorees for this year's Diversity & Pride List, recognizing the most influential multi-ethnic executives, LGBTQ+ executives and D&I Champions in the industry.

Visit www.CablefaxDiversity.com to view the digital issue and read the Q&As from the honorees.

MONUMENTAL SPORTS NET UP AND RUNNING

The newest D.C. RSN has arrived. What was formerly **NBC Sports Washington** is now **Monumental Sports Network** as the net officially went live Wednesday morning ahead of the 2023-24 **NBA** and **NHL** seasons. Linear viewers can find the channel at the same spot where NBC Sports Washington was, but they'll see the new "Monumental M" logo on programming guides. MSN's current distribution deals include **Comcast/Xfinity**, **Cox**, **DirectTV**, **fubo**, **Hulu**, **Mediacom**, **Optimum**, **Charter/Spectrum**, **Verizon** and **YouTube TV**. On the digital side, the network's app will allow fans to live stream games through authentication with Pay TV credentials. On-demand viewing of original programming, game plays and other content will also be available on the app, which is on **Apple TV**, **Roku**, **Amazon Fire TV** as well as desktop and mobile devices. What's also to come for Monumental is a new production plant and broadcast studio set to open in early 2024. The facility will have two studios to avoid any nights of conflicting broadcasts. Once it officially opens, MSN plans to upgrade its video quality from 1080i to 1080p, and it'll have the capability to upgrade to 4K in the future. MSN also intends to roll out an alternate telecast strategy in the new facility, something fellow RSN **MSG Networks** has done in the past year.

CLEANUP ON AISLE FCC

Zoom Telephonics' petitions for the **FCC** to reconsider **Charter's Time Warner Cable** and **Bright House** acquisitions as well as **Altice's** purchase of **Cablevision** are officially off the books. Zoom Telephonics, a creator of cable modems and other Internet access products under the **Motorola** brand, merged in 2020 with **Minim**, a developer of an AI-driven WiFi management and IoT security platform for homes, SMBs and service providers. Minum filed in July to withdraw the petitions with the FCC Media Bureau dismissing them this week. We're told FCC staffers were looking to clean up some dormant matters, which this certainly falls under. The Charter petition was filed on June 8, 2016, while the Altice petition was filed on June 2, 2016. Both petitions questioned whether it was permissible for the FCC to avoid ruling on, or deferring consideration of, matters relating to billing transparency. There's a bit of history here. On the same day the FCC released its 2016 order approving the Charter-Time Warner Cable-Bright House transaction, the FCC Media Bureau entered into a consent decree to resolve its investigation into whether Charter prevented the connection of customer-owned cable modems to its network without determining whether they posed a harm. The Media Bureau

The WHO and the WHY

CFX's spotlight on recent new hires & promotions



SOFIA Chang
EVP/CHIEF DISTRIBUTION OFFICER
STARZ

3 THINGS TO KNOW

- Sofia returns to the media space after a 2.5-year hiatus. She'll oversee all of Starz's streaming platforms' sales activities with both multichannel and digital video distributors in the U.S. Sofia will be based in New York and report to President, Domestic Networks Alison Hoffman.
- Sofia was most recently CEO of Girl Scouts of the USA—a position she held for over a year—but prior to that, she spent over 20 years under the WarnerMedia tree. She initially held management positions across home entertainment, consumer marketing and licensing and program planning and strategy, but climbed to President, Distribution and guided distribution revenue for all HBO branded channels. Sofia helped usher in \$12 billion in annual subscription revenue for HBO, HBO Max, Turner and its other brands, and also played a key role in HBO Max's early subscriber growth with four million in the service's first month.
- She was the first Asian American CEO in the Girl Scouts of the USA's history and is a lifetime member herself. Sofia earned her Bachelor's from the University of Pennsylvania and is fluent in Mandarin Chinese.

investigation began after Zoom had alleged Charter infringed on subscribers' rights.

RATINGS

The two Monday Night Football games on **ESPN** averaged 21.78 million viewers across **ESPN**, **ABC**, **ESPN2**, **ESPN+** and **ESPN Deportes** when they overlapped. Saints vs Panthers—which kicked off at 7:15pm on ESPN, ESPN2 and ESPN Deportes—averaged 7 million viewers, while the Browns vs Steelers on ABC, ESPN+ and **NFL+** notched 15.4 million with an 8:15pm kickoff. The two contests combined for a 6% improvement compared to the staggered MNF start in Week 2 of last season. – **HBO's** "Hard Knocks: Training Camp with the New York Jets" averaged 4.4 million viewers per episode over the summer, which is the largest audience for the series since 2010—which also featured the Jets. Hard Knocks was the top unscripted series on **Max** during its five-week run. Additionally, HBO's three-part docuseries "Telemarketers" became its most-watched non-sports docuseries in over two

years with 1.9 million average viewers per episode.

JIC GRANTS CONDITIONAL CERTIFICATION FOR TRIO

The U.S. Joint Industry Committee approved conditional certification for **Comscore**, **iSpot** and **VideoAmp**, marking the next step in offering ad buyers and sellers more currency options beyond **Nielsen**. The three companies were deemed transactable after passing the JIC's first stage of analysis. Full certification is anticipated to be awarded in early 2024 to those who pass the data evaluation portion of JIC's analysis. If that status is granted, certification will span a two-year term before being subject to further audit and evaluation to maintain full certification status. The certification process is being handled by the advanced advertising company **OpenAP**.

CHARTER, QUALCOMM COLLAB FOR WIFI 7 ROUTER

Charter and **Qualcomm** have joined forces to introduce an advanced WiFi router that comes packed with WiFi 7 and 10 Gbps capabilities to Spectrum Internet customers. The advanced router will enable higher throughput and lower latency through the implementation of new features such as increased channel size up to a peak of 320 MHz, multi-link operation, 4K modulation for increased capacity and flexible channel utilization to reduce interference. It's expected to become available to Spectrum customers in 2024.

FUSE POSTS SOLID UPFRONT

The Latino-owned **Fuse Media** closed its upfronts this year with double-digit growth in volume and high single-digit growth in CPMs across its linear and digital offerings. Fuse's FAST lineup including **Shades of Black**, **Backstage**, **Latino Vibes** and **OUTtv Proud** has earned nearly 2 billion minutes so far in 2023, with each channel posting double- or triple-digit growth in viewership so far this year.

FIBER FRENZY

MCTV launched 1 Gig residential fiber services in areas where its Excellerate FTTH network is available, giving customers speeds up to 4X faster than previous offerings. The tier has no data caps, modem fees or contracts and provides symmetrical speeds up to 1000 Mbps.

ESPN MUST-HAVE ON BETA STUDY

ESPN easily came out on top when **Beta Research** asked viewers to rate a network on being a "must-have" channel, with 74% ranking the sports net as a 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale. Sixty-seven percent ranked sibling **ESPN2** as must-have, followed by **Disney**

Channel (66%), **Discovery Channel** (65%), **ID** (65%) and **Nickelodeon** (65%). Viewers put ESPN's average perceived value at \$2.45, with Disney and ESPN2 at \$2.15 each, and **Paramount** at \$2.12, according to Beta. When it comes to five favorite basic cable nets, men 18+ most frequently mentioned **ESPN** (37%), **History** (23%) and **Discovery** (20%). **Warner Bros. Discovery** nets reigned with women, who cited **Food Network** (29%), **ID** (20%) and **HGTV** (19%). The Beta Research Multichannel Subscriber Study – Evaluation of Basic Cable Networks measured 42 basic cable networks and was conducted June 2023 online among a national sample of 1,500 cable and satellite dish subscribers age 18+.

BETA RESEARCH CHANGE-UP

For decades, the industry has received syndicated cable network studies from **Beta Research**. Not anymore. The studies will still come, but they'll be renamed as EMR Beta Cable Network Studies. A new company, **Erdos Media Research** (EMR), has been created from sister companies Beta Research and **Erdos & Morgan**, which will no longer exist. *Andy Klein*, who has conducted extensive research into the cable segment for more than 30 years, will run the syndicated EMR cable network studies as President of the Cable TV Division.

LET THE CABLE-TEC GAMES BEGIN

The roster of **SCTE** International Cable-Tec Games competitors dropped Wednesday, where 27 field workers from the U.S. and Canada will participate at the upcoming **Cable-Tec Expo** in Denver. The event will take place October 19 at 9am MT with events spanning seven categories: cable splicing, meter reading, cable jeopardy, optical time domain reflectometer, fiber splicing, drop connection and machine tool design and research. The company with the most qualified workers this year is **Comcast** with nine, followed by **Charter** with five, **Cox** with three and **Armstrong** and **Cogeco Cable** who each have two. Other companies represented include **Mediacom**, **Ritter Communications**, **Sparklight**, **Vyve Broadband** and **Optimum**.

AWARDS

Graybar and **DirectTV** were the two industry names that landed on *Newsweek's* annual Top 100 Most Loved Workplaces [list](#). The electrical, communications and data networking products distributor landed at No. 80, while DirectTV checked in at No. 92. The list was made in partnership with the Best Practice Institute, which measures five different areas to help rank companies: the level of collaboration at the company, how positive workers are about their future at the company, how much employer values align with employee values, respect at all levels and career achievement. External public ratings, direct interviews and written responses are also taken into account.

Think about that for a minute...

FREE

Commentary by Steve Effros

My dad always reminded me of the old saying; “there ain’t no such thing as a free lunch!” Of course, he was right. I’ve tried to explain that for most of my professional life. I guess it was just meant to be that I would get involved in the cable industry at a time when its primary competitor characterized itself as “Free TV.”

Needless to say I spent a whole lot of time in the early years of my representation of cable explaining over and over again that broadcast television, “OTA” or “over the air” as they call it today, was not “free!” To be sure, it had a business model that hid the cost to consumers, and it did that very well. But every time you “squeezed the Charmin,” or popped the top on a Bud, or were reminded how tough Ford’s truck was, you were paying for “free TV.” All that advertising revenue the broadcasters made came right out of consumer/viewer pockets in the form of increased prices for those products. “Free?” No, just indirect.

When the ad model started to get strained, and the cost of television production, or acquisition as is the case with sports, went up, the broadcasters had to find a second revenue stream. The answer: “retransmission consent.” That “free” television, even though you could get it from the government owned spectrum with an antenna without paying for it directly, had to be paid for if you needed help getting the signal. That’s what cable television, then called community antenna television, was all about. So if the signal was not easy to get and you had to pay for delivery the broadcasters demanded, and got, the ability to take a piece of the action from the cable bill. So much for “free.”

But things are different now. We not only have OTA and cable, we have streaming, and a whole lot more competition and much higher costs. Consumers are finding out that the old “no such thing...” saying is becoming an extremely expensive reality.

Why? Because the programming costs continue to go up exponentially. The competition for “original” programming got fierce. The contract negotiations for the right to carry sports programming got ridiculous, and the number of channels, thus

the advertising base, got split up into too many pieces.

The problem for consumers, however, is that a lot of them didn’t have my dad whispering in their ear about that “no free lunch” thing, and they were encouraged by the new competitive “streaming” services to think that they could enjoy “all you could watch” at a very low price. Of course that was done to get folks “hooked,” and they should have known what would happen next. It has.

All major streaming service providers have now significantly raised their prices. The increases are not likely to abate any time soon. New lower cost tiers of programming with ads have been introduced, but the advertising is so intrusive it virtually screams at you to “upgrade” to the ad-free version. And yet, the business plans of many of the streamers have yet to produce anything but major losses. As I noted last week, the likelihood is we’ll see a lot of consolidation and a lot of bundling to try to get out of this mess.

But wait, it would appear that another one of my favorite aphorisms is at play, this one from my grandmother: “even a donkey doesn’t trip over the same stone twice!” Oh, yeah?

Look at what’s about to happen in the “Internet” sphere. “Free” ad supported services have enamored a whole lot of us. We’re hooked. But Elon Musk just announced he’s going to start charging a monthly subscription for “X, formerly Twitter.” My bet: he won’t be alone! “Free lunches” never last.



Steve

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(Steve Effros was President of CATA for 23 years and is now an advisor and consultant to the cable industry. His views do not necessarily reflect the views of Cablefax.)

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