

Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

On the Case: Hallmark Media Rebranding Two Linear Networks

There have been a lot of changes at **Hallmark Media** lately and even more are on the way. Twenty-year-old network **Hallmark Movies & Mysteries** will rebrand to **Hallmark Mystery** on March 6, while younger sibling **Hallmark Drama** will become **Hallmark Family** on Feb. 28, **CFX** has learned.

While it may sound like mere semantics, the revamps are a bit more substantial. Hallmark plans to unveil the new brands as part of its **TCA Winter Press Tour** presentations Tuesday. The change to Hallmark Mystery represents Hallmark leaning into the cozy mystery genre, with a record number of new and returning mystery series. On Friday, the net debuted its first historical mystery, “Gilded Newport Mysteries: Murder at the Breakers.” Starring *Ali Skovbye*, it’s based off a series of books from author *Alyssa Maxwell*, which opens the door for a potential franchise.

All clues point to a greater emphasis on Hallmark Mystery, with *Alison Sweeney* (“Days of Our Lives”) returning as Hannah Swensen later this year in Hallmark’s latest adaptation of a *Joanne Fluke* novel. Sweeney wrote her first script, based on the book “Apple Turnover Murder” and is executive producer on the film, “One Bad Apple: A Hannah Swensen Mystery.” Hallmark Media is committing to a bigger investment in mystery for the channel, though the plan for now is to still fund its “Miracles of Christmas” programming stunt, perhaps with a bit more of a mystery bend to some titles. The holiday programming stunt has performed well for the net, with December’s

“Miracle in Bethlehem, PA,” becoming its #1 most-watched original movie premiere of the year and second most-watched in network history among key demographics

The rebrand of Hallmark Drama, which launched in October 2017, seems more like a clarification of its spotlight on storytelling for the whole family around faith, love and community.

“Hallmark Media is home to a wide range of content offerings that deliver on the promise of providing comfort and joy, and it is our goal to ensure that viewing experiences across all networks and platforms are uniquely authentic,” Hallmark Media’s Programming EVP *Lisa Hamilton Daly* said in a statement. “We look forward to debuting the rebranded networks, where fans can continue to enjoy fun, engaging mysteries on Hallmark Mystery and wholesome family stories on Hallmark Family.”

The rebrands come following *Wonya Lucas* stepping down at the end of last year as President & CEO after three years in the role. Hallmark Companies President & CEO *Mike Perry*, whose corporate role already had him overseeing Hallmark Media along with Hallmark Global and Crayola, is now leading the day-to-day operations of the media business. As part of the shift to a more streamlined structure, CMO *Lara Richardson*, Chief People Officer *Pamela Wolfe*, EVP, Research Strategy *Robin Thomas* and Head of Distribution *Judi Lopez* were let go in a round of layoffs last month. “Some executive leadership roles were eliminated, while new and expanded roles were created in order to forge new opportunities that will strengthen our focus on our core, and build new capabili-

Cablefax What’s on the horizon for Cablefax?

Here’s what you won’t want to miss out on...

<p>FAXIES Awards Final Deadline March 1st</p>	<p>Cablefax 100 Magazine Release April 25th</p>	<p>American Broadband Congress Conference The Event June 13th</p>
<p>Top Ops Awards Entries Open February 27th Final Deadline April 30th Magazine Release August 19th</p>	<p>Diversity List Entries Open April 15th Final Deadline June 24th Magazine Release October 21st</p>	<p>Most Powerful Women Awards Entries Open May 6th Final Deadline August 28th Magazine Release December 6th</p>

To start a nomination or learn more about what Cablefax has to offer this year, visit our site, www.cablefax.com/calendar

VIEW CABLEFAX CALENDAR

ties for our consumers and viewers,” the company said in a statement that reiterated Hallmark’s commitment to the media business, touting Hallmark Channel closing out 2023 as the most-viewed cable entertainment network among key demos.

The makeover news is big for Hallmark Media, but it’s also a sign that programmers see the continued importance of the Televisions Critics Association’s annual press tour. Last January marked the tour’s first return to in-person panels since COVID, but it was a bit lighter, with only **AMC**, **MGM** and **Apple** presenting during the **CTAM**-organized section of the tour. The Hollywood strikes put the kibosh on a Summer 2023 tour, and the strikes’ late settlement made it touch-and-go on whether the Winter Tour would return for 2024.

But it is back, kicking off today in Pasadena with a full day of Apple TV panels followed by a **Lifetime** dinner. Tomorrow includes **BET+** and **AMC Networks** along with Hallmark Media. **Disney** dominates the broadcast portion of the tour. **NBC/Peacock** has a day as do **PBS** and **Warner Bros. Discovery**. **The CW** is also taking a day after skipping last year’s tour.

.....

DIRECTV LOSES CMG STATIONS

DirecTV and U-verse customers lost **Cox Media Group** programming at midnight Friday. Not only did the two fail to reach a consensus on a new retransmission contract, but they also can’t agree on how many consumers are impacted. While CMG claimed DirecTV “has once again blocked millions of consumers,” the MVPD said less than one million DirecTV, DirecTV Stream and U-verse customers had access to the stations at the time of the contract’s expiration. DirecTV is offering impacted customers a one-time \$10 credit as it continues to negotiate with the broadcaster. CMG’s portfolio of 14 stations includes Atlanta ABC affil WSB and Seattle’s CBS station. DirecTV lost CMG stations in 2021, with stations restored just hours before the Super Bowl. DISH has been without CMG stations since November 2022.

.....

WALL STREET STUMPED ON CHARTER’S 4Q23 RESULTS

Charter stock fell another 4.87% Monday as investors and analysts contemplated what to make of the company’s 4Q23 broadband sub decline and the outlook for the coming year. **J.P. Morgan** downgraded the MVPD to “neutral,” and **Pivotal** lowered its price target by \$50 to \$450. But the broader picture is a complicated one, and Pivotal isn’t sure that Charter should really be trading at a discount compared to the telcos. **T-Mobile** guided to a slowdown to fixed wireless subscribers, and Charter will be ready to step in with a converged wireline/wireless package that seems likely to win over customers

that may have been tempted by fixed wireless options. “While investors may need to be patient, CHTR, in our opinion, is simply too cheap with the replacement value of these assets (the dominant high speed broadband player in 50% of their footprint and duopoly in the balance with a highly compelling converged wireless/wireline offering that cannot be matched by their competition) significantly higher than even our new target valuation,” Pivotal said in a note to clients.

.....

FRONTIER LAUNCHES WIDE-RANGING STRATEGIC REVIEW

Frontier Communications is launching a strategic view of its business in hopes of finding more opportunities to create shareholder value. It’s a next step in the company’s evolution since it emerged from bankruptcy in 2021, and it will look at further optimizations of its operational and financing strategy, potential strategic partnerships, joint ventures, divestitures, mergers and business combinations. It has also added an M&A connoisseur to its board with the addition of **Woody Young**, former Chairman of Mergers and Acquisitions at **Perella Weinberg Partners**. He led the firm’s U.S. telecom and media advisory businesses. He also spent time as Co-Head of Global Telecommunications, Media and Technology at financial services firm **Lazard**. “We are enthusiastic about Frontier’s continued business momentum and potential for shareholders,” **Jana Partners**, a prominent Frontier shareholder, said in a statement. “We support the Company’s focus and review of all opportunities to unlock shareholder value—and are confident in the Board and management team’s ability to do so.”

.....

DIAMOND SPORTS, THREE MLB TEAMS FIND COMMON GROUND

Diamond Sports has a path forward with three of the **MLB** teams for which it had telecast rights. It filed three motions in the Southern Texas Bankruptcy Court Friday to add amendments to its telecast rights agreements with the **Minnesota Twins**, **Texas Rangers** and the **Cleveland Guardians** that would allow Diamond to continue to broadcast games through the end of the 2024 season. “The Amendment benefits the Debtors by, among other things, allowing the Debtors to profitably broadcast Twins’ games through the 2024 MLB season in accordance with the business plan contemplated by the [Restructuring Support Agreement]. The Amendment benefits the Twins by providing them with clarity and assurances through the 2024 MLB season and allows them to transition operations to an alternative broadcaster before the start of the 2025 MLB season,” the motion tied to the Twins deal said.

In The WILD

A Cablefax feature highlighting marketing and media efforts spotted in the real world.

Super Bowl Sunday is this weekend, but Pluto TV helped me get prepared late last week by sending along a potato. No, that isn't a typo. It's a tie-in to the ad-supported streamer's first-ever ad for the big game, and it transports viewers to Pluto TV Country. What do they grow on their farm? Couch potatoes.



Individuals in potato suits sit on beds of vegetables and are watered with the best fertilizer money can buy—content. Each potato is a little different with viewing habits ranging from sci-fi to romantic mystery. One is weightlifting while he watches, and another is accompanied by their beloved cat (also in a miniature potato suit).

Pluto TV wants folks to walk away feeling like they have a television option that is easy and free, the way they think it should be. I walked away feeling all of that, and maybe a little hungry. Even better, for every potato sent out as part of this campaign, another was donated to food banks for families in need. You can take a peek at the ad ahead of Super Bowl Sunday [here](#) while I get busy making some fries.

– Sara Winegardner

Streaming rights are not included in the deals. Representation for Diamond and the three teams will appear remotely at a hearing this Friday at 10am ET where Judge Christopher Lopez is expected to make a decision on the deals' approvals.

.....

NEXSTAR BOARD TWEAKS CEO/ CHAIR POLICY

Nexstar's board is adopting a new policy upon the eventual departure of Perry Sook. It states the same individual can't hold the roles of Chairperson of the Board and CEO of the company at the same time. It'll go into effect when Sook—who holds both positions—leaves Nexstar. His current contract runs through March 31, 2026. "The board believes the adoption of this policy is in the best interests of the company and its shareholders, as the new policy does not interfere with Mr. Sook's continued leadership of Nexstar and the benefits he brings to the Company, while establishing a plan that provides a runway for the most qualified individuals to serve as Chief Executive Officer and Chairperson in the future," Nexstar said.

.....

AT THE COMMISSION

The FCC's Wireline Competition Bureau published the agency's Preventing Digital Discrimination FNPRM on Feb. 1, and any comments on it are now being welcomed. The FNPRM asks for takes on the potential benefits and costs of establishing an Office of Civil Rights within the Commission as well as on two sets of affirmative obligations for broadband providers. Comments are due on March 4, and reply comments are due April 1.

.....

PEOPLE

Michael Claffey is headed to Family Entertainment Television to be the next VP, Regional Sales for FETV and FMC. Claffey previously spent five years at AMC Networks as VP, Sales and seven years at NBCUniversal as VP, Cable Entertainment. He was most recently with the online audio and video media company Spotter. – Scripps tapped Tony Song to the newly created position of Head of Network Sales and Advanced TV. He'll begin Wednesday. Song will be tasked with overseeing the company's go-to-market strategy and helping with long-term revenue growth across Scripps' national assets, in particular regarding its advanced TV, CTV, sports and news. Song arrives from AMC Networks where he was SVP, Ad Sales and Partnerships, and also previously led East Coast national media sales for BET. – Craig Jacobson, a Founding Partner at the firm of Hansen, Jacobson, Teller, Hoberman, Newman, Warren, Richman, Rush, Kaller, Gellman, Meigs & Fox, LLP, informed Charter's board that he is not standing for re-election. He'll continue to serve as a director through the company's 2024 annual meeting of shareholders. To fill the vacancy, the board plans to nominate Carolyn Slaski at the meeting. Slaski currently serves as EY Americas Vice Chair, Talent at Ernst & Young.