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WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Rivalry Week: NBCU, Fox Kick Off Slate of Upfronts

The day began with *Jimmy Fallon* singing “We need to sell ads for our lineups,” and ended with **Fox** “sparing no expense” to woo advertisers. That can only indicate one thing: the upfronts are here.

It’s a big week in the Big Apple as **NBCUniversal**, **Fox**, **Disney**, **Amazon**, **Warner Bros.**, **Discovery**, **Netflix**, **YouTube** and more line up to make their pitches to advertisers, but Monday had an extra contentious feel amid a competitive media landscape. NBCU’s upfront Monday morning included a standup bit from late-show host *Seth Meyers*, who took shots at **Fox News**, **Paramount** and competitors in his monologue.

“If you’re looking for the Fox News upfront, that’s happening outside a lower Manhattan courtroom,” Meyers said. “I found \$20 on the street this morning. Long story short, I’m one of the two finalists for Paramount.”

Fox gave it right back at the opening of its presentation later Monday evening. “Live from the city that never sleeps, unless you were at the NBC upfront,” actor *Will Arnett* said.

The ongoing battles and not-so-subtle digs encapsulate how the landscape is during this year’s upfronts, especially as folks begin to bundle and team up for joint ventures. The jv with the most buzz at the moment—the **Disney**, **Fox** and **WBD** sports streamer—saw no additional news come out Monday. However, there are still deals to be done, and along with the growing competition on both digital and linear platforms comes the intrigue of how advertisers will allocate their budgets toward

both of those platforms.

NBCU took a “we’re everywhere” approach to flaunt the opportunities it has for advertisers. “While others have been spinning, we’ve spent the last year investing—investing in our content, in the technology that powers our platforms and in the overall experience for our customers and our advertisers,” NBCU Chairman *Mark Lazarus* said at Radio City Music Hall on Monday. “All in all, 273 million people interact with our content each and every month, and we’re engaging those audiences from morning to night on TV screens, mobile screens, movie screens and even off-screen with events like BravoCon and experiences like our Universal Theme Parks.”

Mark Marshall, NBCU Chairman, Global Advertising & Partnerships, expanded on some of those technology investments, specifically about its One Platform Total Audience product that was introduced in January and how it’s performed so far. NBCU worked with the brands **Amgen** and **OMG** on two parallel campaigns—one using the new One Platform and the other a legacy transaction—and found One Platform Total Audience delivered 38% higher in-target cross-platform reach and a 22% spike in search volume. NBCU also worked with **Domino’s** and **GroupM** to run parallel campaigns, except it kept track of purchases made on the pizza giant’s app and website. That resulted in a 38% increase in sales compared to its traditional plan.

“We did not create another opaque walled garden. We gave visibility to where every single unit ran,” Marshall said. “We’re utilizing our new gen AI audience capabilities to make these results even stronger by tapping into audience segments



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around human connections that can be tailored to your brand's KPIs. This is the future of advertising.”

Fox took a different angle at how it targets audiences. President, Advertising Sales, Marketing and Brand Partnerships *Jeff Collins* pointed to a quote from a former Coca-Cola CMO that presence doesn't necessarily mean impact, adding that Fox's strategy is centered on one word: focused.

“In fourth quarter, advertisers on Fox reached more consumers than any other media company but with almost 1/3 less frequency,” Collins said. “Our strategy is very different. We view change as an opportunity to focus our portfolio on the content that's most important to our audiences and our advertisers, investing all of our resources into areas where we can be best in class like news and sports.”

ROKU TO BE HOME OF SUNDAY MLB SHOWDOWNS

Roku has hit a home run, scoring exclusive multi-year rights for **MLB's** “Sunday Leadoff” live games. Starting May 19, Roku will offer MLB games for free on The Roku Channel and on most Sundays throughout the season, Roku will be the home of the first games of the day with an exclusivity window during airtime. Roku is also creating an MLB Zone to help fans easily find live and upcoming games, recaps, highlights and a fully programmed MLB FAST channel. Game telecasts will be produced in collaboration with MLB with broadcast teams to be market-focused. Paying subscribers of **MLB.TV** will be able to watch all 18 games without blackout restrictions.

ALLAN BLOCK SUES COMPANY, FAMILY OVER ATTEMPTED SALES

Block Communications CEO/Chair *Allan Block* has filed a suit against the company and a number of his family members, filing a motion for a preliminary injunction Wednesday in Ohio's Lucas County Common Pleas Court that would prevent his family from selling **Buckeye Broadband** and other businesses owned by the parent company. The suit alleges that Block's brother, *John Block*, has been working behind the scenes to convince a majority of Block family members to form a strategic committee tasked with selling the company. That committee does not include Allan Block or his designee to the company's board. The suit claims that John Block has wanted to supplant Allan Block from the CEO seat for some time, even calling himself the “sovereign” of Block Communications. It alleges he wants to tear the company apart because he can't have it himself and argues that John Block's actions reek of bad faith and serve no purpose other than to freeze out Allan Block. “The sale of the Company is far from ur-

gent; valuation multiples are lower than they were only two years ago, and the Company is harvesting acquisitions that have yet to pay substantial dividends, but are likely to do so in the future,” it said. The formation of the committee without his involvement is also alleged to be in violation of Allan Block's rights under his employment agreement. Block Communications President/COO *Jodi Miehl*s released a statement saying the company couldn't comment on the pending litigation, but that its customers and business partners should expect operations to continue as normal while the suit moves through the court system. “Block Communications has earned a well-deserved reputation for being first in customer service across diverse business units. That proud tradition of service will continue without interruption,” Miehl's said.

SENATE COMMERCE TO TAKE A WHACK AT ACP RE-FUNDING

The game of will or won't ACP be extended continues on, with Senate Commerce Chair *Maria Cantwell's* (D-WA) spectrum bill scheduled to be marked up Thursday. A previous mark-up was postponed to deal with the FAA reauthorization bill, which was passed with no amendments—including one to re-fund the Affordable Connectivity Program. Cantwell's spectrum bill offers another shot, providing \$7 billion to continue funding the broadband subsidy program. It also would return the FCC's auction authority, require the agency to auction the upper 12 GHz band in three years and have **NTIA** establish national testbeds for dynamic spectrum sharing. If a bill re-funding ACP makes it out of committee and is allowed a vote, it's expected to pass the Senate. But **New Street Research** warns it's still an uphill battle because the firm believes it's unlikely Speaker *Mike Johnson* (R-LA) will allow a vote. Meanwhile, **Treasury** Secretary *Janet Yellen* made the trek to Stafford County, VA, Monday to see a recently completed **Comcast** rural broadband project that was a public-private partnership between the operator and county funded through a grant from ARPA. Nearly 700 homes were connected under the project with Comcast investing nearly \$900 million dollars in technology and infrastructure in Virginia over the past three years. Yellen took a moment to urge Congress to continue support for ACP, but she also noted that the Senate may vote this week on a resolution that would overturn Treasury's guidance on obligating state and local fiscal recovery funds. “The guidance gave state, local, territorial and Tribal governments the clarity and flexibility they needed to work toward completing projects, from expanding internet access to building affordable housing. If the guidance is overturned, critical projects—such as nearly 8,000 infrastructure projects across the country, including over 100 here in Virginia—may not have the funding they need,” she said in prepared remarks. “It's crucial that localities can move these projects forward to improve the lives of Americans across the country.”

COMCAST, ONE MINISTRIES MUST CARRY SPAT STILL GOING

Comcast is objecting to One Ministries Inc's request for the full Commission to reverse the FCC Media Bureau's April 2023 decision denying its petition that sought to add the Santa Rosa, CA, communities served by Comcast to KQSL's must-carry local television market. One Ministries filed the petition on April 25, shortly after the Media Bureau [denied](#) its petition for reconsideration of the 2023 order. "One Ministries Inc (OMI) continues its sustained attempt to leverage the Commission's rules for Distributed Transmission Service to shift the service of television station KQSL from its 'principal community' of license and main transmitter in Fort Bragg toward geographically distant communities with greater populations," Comcast told the FCC in a filing Friday. OMI argues that the Bureau order doesn't give sufficient weight to KQSL's historic carriage. "Every other MVPD providing service to Santa Rosa carries KQSL, and Comcast itself carries KQSL in adjacent communities. This factor should weigh strongly in KQSL's favor," the broadcaster said. Comcast said OMI is trying to compare KQSL to a 2021 market modification order for its KVMD station. "In contrast to KVMD's carriage on at least four other wireline MVPDs 'within and immediately adjacent to' the communities KVMD sought to add to its market, 'KQSL has been carried in Santa Rosa by one MVPD, U-Verse, for slightly over a decade,' and was carried on Comcast's adjacent cable system 'for fewer than two years' at the time of OMI's Petition, as the Bureau correctly observed," Comcast said. "KQSL simply has not been carried on multiple MVPDs in the community, does not share a transmission location with other stations carried by Comcast, and therefore does not warrant the same consideration KVMD received."

UPFRONT ANNOUNCEMENTS

Both NBCUniversal and Fox trickled in announcements throughout their presentations. *Kevin Hart* and *Kenan Thompson* will host a post-Olympics highlight show on **Peacock** during the games this summer. It also signed *Seth Meyers* to an extension to host "Late Night with Seth Meyers" through 2028, and *Snoop Dogg* and *Michael Bublé* will join "The Voice" as coaches for Season 26. Fox revealed that it'll air a Southern California vs UConn women's basketball contest Dec. 21, which will have an **NFL** game lead-in. **Tubi** wasn't left behind at Fox's upfront either, and it won't be left behind when Fox carries next year's Super Bowl. "Tubi's Purple Carpet" will be part of Fox's pregame coverage with actress *Olivia Culpo* as the Purple Carpet correspondent. Additionally, Tubi will have its original movie "The QB Bad Boy and Me" premiere within the next year in addition to the already announced comedy "The Z-Suite," which will be released in 2025.

HARMONIC ADDS PEARL R-OLT TO PRODUCT PORTFOLIO

Harmonic launched new high-density remote optical line ter-

mination modules designed to help operators simplify their fiber upgrades. The Pearl R-OLT system leverages multiple fiber technologies simultaneously, including GPON, ComboPON and XGS-PON. Harmonic is positioning the offering as a tool enabling operators to increase subscriber retention and quality of experience through targeted deployment of fiber overbuilds in greenfield and existing service areas.

FCC INTRODUCES DESIGNATION FOR SERIOUS SCAMMERS

The FCC introduced a new designation to allow state, federal and international regulatory counterparts and law enforcement to quickly detect and pursue action against threat actors. The Consumer Communications Information Services Threat (C-CIST) designation will be used to label actors that have been involved in defrauding or harming consumers and businesses. When it comes to robocallers, the classification will be used for repeat offenders that transmit particularly nefarious traffic. The FCC's Enforcement Bureau identified the need for the classification and designed the approach, but it is also coordinating with the **FTC**, **DOJ**, state attorneys general and others. *Josh Bercu*, **USTelecom** VP, Policy and Advocacy and Executive Director of the Industry Traceback Group said in a statement that scam robocalls are down 80% from peak levels thanks to the public-private partnership between the group and the FCC. "USTelecom's Industry Traceback Group identified these bad actors or 'C-CISTs' and assisted in shutting them down, and this new FCC initiative will help keep them from coming back," he said.

T-MOBILE BRINGING 5G TO PGA CHAMPIONSHIP

T-Mobile is teaming up with the PGA Championship to deliver golf's first 5G private network in the U.S. It will be used to bring about operational efficiencies and deliver the best viewing experiences for fans. **CBS Sports** will be able to use 5G-connected cameras for new angles of Hole 13, and network slicing will be used to optimize performance during the tournament. More content will be available than ever before on PGA's digital and social channels with pre-championship coverage, and T-Mobile's network paired with 5G cameras will deliver an up-close look of the practice range.

PROGRAMMING

Newsmax2, Newsmax's free streaming offering, will premiere "The Leventhal Report" tonight at 7pm ET. The hour-long news and interview program is hosted by former **Fox News** senior correspondent *Rick Leventhal* and will air weeknights. In addition to being available online, Newsmax2 airs on 20 broadcast stations through digital channels, including Philly's WDPN and Vegas' KPVM.