

Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Knowledge Base: Stinchcomb Sees AI as Opportunity for CuriosityStream

The buzz around artificial intelligence is only growing, and **CuriosityStream** President/CEO *Clint Stinchcomb* sees more opportunities each day for the technology to not only optimize the company's business, but also to meaningfully expand it.

During an appearance at Singular Research's Summer Solstice Conference, Stinchcomb highlighted translation opportunities and an acceleration of the speed of editing and sequencing as helpful ways to cut costs. There are also avenues to explore when it comes to general operations and customer service, but Stinchcomb looks at it as a brand-new category of licensing partners.

"You've got the five or six big companies... but what's been interesting to learn as we go a lot deeper in this is there's 90 to 100 other companies that are looking to license content to help train their AI models like the **Adobe's** of the world," he said. "It's interesting and I don't want to oversell it until we do some deals, but I think it's a potentially catalytic opportunity. And again, not only are they interested in licensing video, and so we're aggregating more, but they're also interested in licensing things like still images, scripts and raw source footage."

Competition in the streaming ecosystem has never been more fierce, and Stinchcomb believes consolidation will only be good for the factual streaming service he's been leading since 2018. He knows CuriosityStream will never have the subscriber

numbers of the top five streamers. But it is profitable and the company is carrying no debt at this time. There are many that can't say the same, and the stress larger streamers will face to keep up with rising content costs may trigger M&A soon.

"We do think over the next couple of years, even over the next year, that there will be a fair bit of carnage. Even with some of the larger-scale companies, they've already made announcements that they'll be selling off things and looking at transactions that can help them firm up their balance sheet," he said.

CuriosityStream, whose board approved a share repurchase plan for up to \$4 million of outstanding shares of the company's common stock last week, has not always had such a healthy balance sheet, and Stinchcomb is not afraid to acknowledge that. But it has now achieved a critical mass of original content and is taking a step back from those productions in favor of acquisitions, which are less expensive. That also allows the team to be more surgical in terms of adding only what the service needs rather than unwanted bloat.

"Most of the factual content that's awesome is in the \$200,000-450,000 range in terms of original content, and the acquisition side is dramatically less than that," Stinchcomb said. "You compare that to just an episode of 'Law and Order' on **NBC**, that's \$6 million an hour... that's just a different cost structure."

There are times when CuriosityStream is aggregating more bulk to serve its ad-supported platform Curiosity Now and to

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diversify its revenue streams, But even as CuriosityStream builds its content library, it is more dedicated than ever to its identity as a destination for factual programming. Stinchcomb knows that the service can differentiate itself by being expertly curated and not by expanding into other genres that don't align with the brand just to acquire new subscribers.

"We're not going to bid on sports rights. We're not going to bid on scripted content that just has a completely different cost structure," Stinchcomb said. "We're running our own race. We believe we've turned the ship, we're building a profitable, durable company... we want to have an awesome product, but it's for people who want factual programming, nonfiction programming they can watch and that is curated in a manner that's better than anybody else."

CHARTER LAYOFFS

Charter is slashing around 1,000 jobs as it looks to consolidate its call center operations, first reported to *Light Reading* and confirmed by **CFX**. "Spectrum continues to invest in its network, technology and employees to deliver an exceptional customer experience. Our call center operations are a critical part of that experience, in which we invest and evolve to meet the changing needs of our customers. As part of that change, Customer Service call center operations in these locations will be transitioned to other in-house U.S.-based centers that will offer employees more resources and opportunities in addition to allowing us to deliver information, training and technology to our representatives more efficiently," a Charter spokesperson said. The company is hoping to retain as many employees as possible, offering relocation benefits to other facilities and encouraging employees to apply to other job openings. The news comes days after **Cable One** cut its total employee headcount by about 4%.

FCC BULK BILLING PROPOSAL MAY BE REVISED

FCC Chair *Jessica Rosenworcel's* proposal to ban or put constraints on bulk billing has drawn criticism from a wide array of industry players, and the level of opposition has at least one firm expecting the Chair to revise her original plan. Not only have ISPs of all sizes voiced their concerns that a ban would actually raise prices for consumers, but groups like EducationSuperHighway have also argued against the proposal and recommended a withdrawal of the rulemaking or a delay on any vote to allow the Commission more time to gather information. **New Street Research** doesn't see the proposal moving forward anytime soon, and the level of sup-

port from the other Democrats on the Commission remains unclear. "We don't think the two Democrats will threaten the Chair with complete opposition, but we don't know to what extent they will want to move forward at all or move forward but in modest ways," NSR said in a note to clients. "We also have not seen Congressional Democrats weigh in. They often do not do so until the end of an FCC process, but they can be persuasive with all three Democrats and... this issue has attracted opposition from sources influential with Democrats." If it does move forward, the firm expects something more like an opt-in requirement or a focus by the FCC on details within bulk billing like hidden fees.

CONSUMERS LOOKING FOR MORE BUNDLING OPTIONS, HUB FINDS

It's getting harder and harder for viewers to mix and match streaming services in order to see the programs they want, all while saving a few bucks. But the recent rise in bundling could help save the day, according to research from **Hub's** annual "Best Bundle" study. The study revealed consumers use an average of 7.4 services in 2024, which matches the mark from 2022 but is an increase from 2023's average of 6.4. Approximately 52% of viewers accumulate three or more major streaming services—**Netflix, Prime Video, Disney+, Hulu** and **Max**—which is up from 40% recorded in 2021. When it comes to FAST's involvement, 65% of viewers utilize the free platforms. Where bundling comes in is the 74% of folks who find it appealing if a service would allow the customer to sign up, cancel, pay for and manage subscriptions all in one place. Hub's research was conducted in April and included 1,603 TV consumers with broadband between the ages of 16-74.

SOCCER CHAMPIONS TOUR NABS DIRECTV AS TITLE SPONSOR

DirectTV is returning as the title sponsor for the second annual Soccer Champions Tour. The event will have six matches across the U.S. including the clubs Real Madrid, FC Barcelona, Manchester City, AC Milan and Chelsea FC, taking place July 27-Aug. 6. DirecTV will have a fan experience and brand takeover at the NYC soccer bar named "Legends" to coincide with the tour from July 5-Aug. 12. The DirecTV Champions Lounge will air Soccer Champions Tour and other tournament matches while also offering customized merchandise.

WILLOW SIGNS WITH VIAMEDIA

The cricket streamer **Willow** is partnering with **Viamedia** for

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programmatic ad sales representation. Viamedia will handle ad inventory management for Willow to offer its ad spaces through automated channels that will help improve accuracy and efficiency. Additionally, Viamedia's technology will help Willow boost targeting, reach and ROI from ad campaigns.

CARRIAGE

DirecTV is adding five Lionsgate channels to its lineup for DirecTV and DirecTV Stream customers after signing a new licensing agreement. Joining now are MovieSphere, HerSphere, Ebony TV, Are We There Yet? and Anger Management. DirecTV will add more Lionsgate FAST channels in the coming months.

FIBER FRENZY

Previously unserved homes in Centreville, Maryland, are now getting Breezeline service thanks to a 20-mile fiber expansion initiative funded by the Maryland Office of Statewide Broadband's "Connect Maryland" program, as well as contributions from the company and Queen Anne's County. Residents will get speeds of up to 1 Gbps as well as Breezeline TV and Breezeline Mobile. - ImOn Communications is expanding its fiber network to Camanche, Iowa. The company will build out the city throughout this year. Once complete, residents will have access to speeds of up to 1 Gbps and businesses can get up to 10 Gbps. Camanche is the sixth metro service area to be added to ImOn's network. - Comporium extended its network to an additional 174 addresses in Ridge Spring, South Carolina. It's part of the second phase of Comporium's project in the area, which required nearly \$292,000 of investment. Customers can get plans starting at \$49.99/month for 400 Mbps download speeds and as high as \$75.99/month for 1 Gbps download speeds.

RATINGS

The Red Sox's 9-3 win over the Yankees averaged 2.07 million viewers during this week's edition of ESPN's Sunday Night Baseball. That's the second consecutive week that Sunday Night Baseball drew more than 2 million viewers on average. MLB games on ESPN are averaging 1.58 million viewers so far, up 5% from this point last year. - Part 1 of Starz's "Power Book II: Ghost" Season 4 garnered more than 6.5 million multiplatform viewers in its premiere week. The episode also helped set engagement records on the Starz app, with over 11% of premiere day streams coming in the first hour after the episode debuted. On linear, the premiere was the highest-rated cable program among Black households across the premiere week (June 7-13).

DOING GOOD

As WOW! continues to grow throughout the Palmetto State, the company donated \$10,000 to Rebuild Upstate, a nonprofit

based in Greenville, South Carolina, that repairs homes of low-income families. The money will be used to build a new ramp for a local homeowner in Mauldin. WOW! employees pitched in the build project, and the company is offering the homeowner a year of free internet service. - Charter awarded \$20,000 in scholarships to 15 college students each as part of its Spectrum Scholars initiative. The recipients, who are rising college juniors, will also get the chance to participate in a two-year educational and professional development program. Each person will receive the scholarship to be applied toward their junior and senior years, while also getting a Spectrum mentor, access to networking events and career readiness education and the chance for a paid Spectrum internship.

ON THE CIRCUIT

The Strong Women Alliance will have a presence at this year's StreamTV Show, running June 24-26 in Denver. The group is providing talent as part of its Diversity Spotlight initiative, which places multicultural artists at industry and community events to spotlight changemakers from all cultural backgrounds.

PROGRAMMING

Fox News will simulcast the CNN presidential debate featuring candidates President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump on June 27. The debate will begin at 9pm and be available on Fox News and Fox Business Network. Special programming will also be available on Fox News Digital, Fox News Audio and Fox Nation. Fox News' pre-debate coverage will begin with an early running of "Jesse Watters Primetime" at 7pm followed by "Fox News Democracy 2024" at 8pm. Post-debate coverage will be hosted by Sean Hannity before "Fox News @ Night" begins at midnight. - Season 2 of the Australian crime series "Troppo" will premiere July 25 on Prime Video and Freevee in the U.S., U.K., Germany and Austria. - All 13 episodes of "Kamp Koral: SpongeBob's Under Years" Season 2 will be released July 10 on Paramount+. That's a week before the 25th anniversary of the "SpongeBob SquarePants" series.

PEOPLE

The PR and Marketing firm Bob Gold & Associates is getting a little bigger after forming a streaming media and pay TV communications group that'll be led by Eric Becker in Denver. Becker arrives after being a principal for Becker PR and has spent time as SVP, Corporate Communications of Starz and as SVP, Consumer, Media and Entertainment for ICR. - Lionsgate promoted Chase Brisbin to EVP, International SVOD and Head of Global Channels. She'll oversee the company's FAST channel portfolio in addition to licensing and distribution of Lionsgate's film and TV library.

PROGRAMMER'S PAGE

Disney Jr Dives into Ariel's Childhood

Even mermaid princesses have childhoods. "Disney Jr's Ariel," which makes its debuts on **Disney Jr** June 27 and on **Disney+** the next day, imagines Ariel as an eight-year-old, playing with mer-children, hanging with pals Flounder and Sebastian and cozying up to Auntie Ursula in a Caribbean-inspired underwater kingdom. Yep, you read that right. Ursula is no longer a baddie in this preschool series, instead playing the role of friend and mentor. Executive producer *Lynne Southerland* said she felt the change was important given the show's target audience of four- to six-year-olds. "I can remember watching the original Little Mermaid movie with my godson when he was maybe four, and when Ursula appeared, he would basically bury himself under the covers," Southerland recalled. "We knew that we needed to make Ursula a more accessible entry point for that age group." *Amber Riley*, who voices Ursula, was excited to showcase the nurturing side of the tentacled sea witch. "There are so many amazing lessons they're going to learn, but in a really fun way. It was fun to explore keeping her sternness, but also coming at it from a place of love and just wanting to see her niece do well," Riley said. Ariel is voiced by 12-year-old *Mykal-Michelle Harris* ("Cheaper by the Dozen," "Mixed-ish"), who, like many children, dreamed when she was younger of becoming a **Disney** princess. "It actually happened," she laughed. Harris is especially proud to be part of a production with a diverse group of characters and a multiethnic cast. "It's really important to show that type of cast and crew in front of young kids. Kids are like sponges. They soak up everything," she said. It's a sentiment shared by *Taye Diggs*, who gives voice to Ariel's father King Triton. "Any opportunity to work with Disney is something that you have to seriously consider. But for me, I'm right in that age bracket where I grew up on the Little Mermaid and to be a part of a new kind of construct meant a lot to me," Diggs said. "I'm realizing that this show is kind of making history." – *Amy Maclean*

REVIEWS

"Dancing for the Devil: The 7M TikTok Cult," streaming on **Netflix**. Is it ironic that moments before we write this review a quick break on Instagram yields a short video of *Miranda Derrick* (@itsmirandaderrick) smiling and hugging puppies? Not really, the 27-year-old dancer's videos are a mainstay with those following dance on social media. For the past few years, Derrick has posted numerous videos of herself dancing, sometimes as a soloist, other times with her husband *James* (@bdash_2), *Vik White* (@itsslavik) or a small ensemble. Her talent, bright blue eyes, blonde hair and flawless smile have garnered 2.1 mln Insta followers. However, since this 3-part Netflix doc bowed, her notoriety has moved beyond social media. Derrick's story is the centerpiece of ep 1. Her family and sister claim Miranda is under the thumb of *Robert Shinn*, leader of the Shekinah Church, and a self-proclaimed representative of God. Derrick is one of a slew of internet dancers associated with Shinn. Along with the church, media is one of several businesses in Shinn's portfolio. The longer Derrick was in Shinn's orbit, the more she withdrew from her family, eventually cutting off all contact. Eps 2 and 3 are equally riveting. They relate stories of Shekinah members who have extricated themselves from Shinn. Now they've brought legal claims of sexual abuse. It's a gut-wrenching watch. – *Seth Arenstein*

BASIC CABLE P2+ PRIME RANKINGS* (06/10/24-06/16/24)		
MON-SUN	MC US AA%	MC US AA (000)
FNC	0.654	2060
MSNBC	0.305	963
ESPN	0.264	832
USA	0.260	818
HGTV	0.240	756
HALL	0.229	721
INSP	0.195	616
HIST	0.176	556
TBSC	0.153	481
CNN	0.149	471
DISC	0.146	461
FOOD	0.145	456
ESPN2	0.129	407
TVLAND	0.124	389
ID	0.116	367
TLC	0.115	362
GSN	0.106	335
REELZ	0.102	321
LIFE	0.101	318
WETV	0.098	308
OXY	0.091	286
A&E	0.091	286
TNT	0.088	278
BRAVO	0.087	274
HALLMY5	0.085	268
AMC	0.080	251
BET	0.079	248
NWSMX	0.079	248
FX	0.077	241
PRMNT	0.075	238
SYFY	0.073	229
NAN	0.070	221
ADSM	0.070	219
FRFM	0.063	200
E!	0.062	194

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

DIVERSITY & THE PRIDE LIST

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