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WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Urban One: New MVPD Carriage for Cleo, Bounce Still on Table

Cleo TV kicked off August with launches with three new MVPDs—**Mediacom**, **MCTV** and **Astound Broadband**, helping it add 6 million subs since the end of June. The net also saw a carriage boost from its inclusion in **Comcast's** Now TV \$20/month entertainment offering through **Xumo**. In a day and age of carriage drops, it's notable when a linear network picks up additional households. The sister net of **TV One** has grown considerably since its launch five years ago with **Charter** and **Comcast**, and the latest deals show how Cleo is expanding its borders beyond urban markets.

"Since its launch in 2019, Cleo has reached 44 million households. It is meeting the needs of millennial women of color, offering a wide range of lifestyle programming tailored to this influential and underserved audience," *Johnny Miles*, TV One's Director, Content Distribution and Marketing, Content Distribution and Marketing told **CFX**. "The response has been tremendous, and distributors have embraced Cleo's content. Even in markets with different demographics, Cleo's new and classic shows have proven valuable to viewers of all ages and backgrounds."

That doesn't mean Cleo and TV One aren't facing the same headwinds as other programmers. Parent company **Urban One** presented earnings last week, with the cable segment's revenue falling \$10.9 million to \$41.5 million during 2Q24. While cable advertising (-26.7% YOY) and affiliate revenues (-12.9% YOY) were both impacted by cable subscriber churn and audi-

ence delivery shortfalls, the company noted a bounce-back in ratings and delivery in 3Q24. It is maintaining its \$110-\$120 EBITDA guidance for the full year, but expects to be on the lower end of that given the softness in cable.

"There's still softness in our cable television segment that we have to address. Ultimately, we have to find more impressions to offset the churn we're experiencing. We've got upside coming in terms of our connected TV offering as we switch ad servers that will allow us to better monetize the CTV inventory we have on some over-the-top platforms," Urban One CEO *Alfred Liggins* said during the company's earnings call.

While Urban One operates more than 50 radio stations around the country, it is interested in bolstering its TV holdings. The company revealed earlier this summer that it's considering purchasing **Scripps'** African American-focused network **Bounce**, but there was no update on that. "There's a process going on. We're involved in it. No update at this point and time," said Liggins. Scripps said during its recent earnings call that it expects to have an update in the next couple of months.

Speaking more generically about M&A, Liggins said media companies can't count on topline growth in the current environment. Urban One acquired four Houston radio stations last year. "M&A has got to be not only highly accretive, but it's got to be de-levering," he said. "Any M&A deal that you do that's de-levering out of the box, you have to assume there's going to continue to be downward topline pressure in the industry, whether it's radio or television... We are conscious of the fact

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that it's not just is something de-levering Day 1, but is it going to be continuing to de-lever with the downward trend from an industry standpoint. Finding those deals is hard, but my sense is they will come about because everybody kind of has the same problem."

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PARAMOUNT LAYOFFS BEGIN

Layoffs at **Paramount Global** have officially begun with the first phase of a plan to reduce its US-based workforce by 15% kicking off Tuesday. The full process will be completed in three phases through the rest of the year, and 90% of layoffs should be announced by the end of September. **Paramount Television Studios** is one of this round's victims, and it will cease operations on Friday. "The industry continues to evolve, and Paramount is at an inflection point where changes must be made to strengthen our business. And while these actions are often difficult, we are confident in our direction forward," co-CEOs *George Cheeks*, *Chris McCarthy* and *Brian Robbins* wrote in a memo. "We understand that you may have questions about next steps, and while we may not be able to provide all the answers at this time, we will continue to update you on our progress."

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CRUZ HAS QUESTIONS OVER BEAD FUND USE

New York is the latest state to see its BEAD Initial Proposal approved by **NTIA**, meaning 35 states and territories thus far have entered into the program's implementation phase. But not everyone is thrilled with the way BEAD is moving forward. Sen. *Ted Cruz* (R-TX) sent a letter to NTIA Administrator *Alan Davidson* requesting a detailed update on the administrative delays that have delayed the start of BEAD-subsidized buildouts significantly. He also specifically questioned \$849 million in BEAD funding NTIA has placed into its own budget for the administration of the program. He alleges those dollars are being used to impose unjust administrative burdens. "NTIA has sought to misuse its BEAD authorities to impose rate regulation, unionized labor requirements, climate change regulations, technology mandates, and other extralegal policies on the States," Cruz said. "This has continued despite Congress repeatedly reminding NTIA that Congress gave it no statutory authority to use BEAD for any of these social goals." He asked for a breakdown of administrative funding allocated and utilized by NTIA including for staffing, operational costs, costs paid for contract work and more. Cruz also sought a list of each BEAD proposal submitted by states and territories to NTIA, any changes NTIA requested be made and the reasons

why NTIA has not approved proposals that await the green light from the agency. "This information is necessary for Congress to understand how the BEAD program is progressing and to ensure that the funds are being used appropriately to achieve the program's goal of universal connectivity. It is imperative to improve transparency and accountability in the administration of these funds to build and maintain public trust," Cruz said, requesting the information be delivered by August 27.

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NHL'S PANTHERS LAUNCH DTC

It's been over a month since the Florida Panthers moved local broadcasts from the **Bally Sports** RSN umbrella to an OTA deal with **Scripps Sports**, and now the Stanley Cup champions are partnering with **ViewLift** to launch a new DTC streaming service. All locally available games will be streamed on the platform, which will launch before the upcoming 2024-25 season. That's in addition to games being available on local stations WSFL, WHDT and a to-be-announced station in Ft. Myers. Other content will include on-demand programming and other fan-centric pieces. ViewLift already works with other teams on similar offerings such as the Las Vegas Golden Knights and Washington Capitals.

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CURIOSITYSTREAM FULL SPEED AHEAD AFTER 2Q24 EARNINGS

CuriosityStream made it seven straight quarters of adjusted free cash flow improvement after wrapping up 2Q24. The company achieved an adjusted free cash flow of \$2.5 million, which is an improvement compared to the \$6.8 million it recorded in the prior year quarter. Direct subscription revenue increased sequentially and YOY, according to the company, and gross profit rose to \$6.4 million compared to the \$4.2 million in 2Q23. However, there were some tough spots for CuriosityStream as total revenue came in at \$12.4 million—down YOY from \$14.1 million—and operating loss reached \$2.55 million, which is an improvement from the \$9.92 million Curiosity recorded last year. Total advertising and marketing and general and administrative expenses were \$8.9 million. The company has bright spots to look forward to as the second half of 2024 is underway. CuriosityStream launched three Spanish-language FAST channels thanks to a partnership with **Estrella Media**, and it also launched a distribution partnership with Hong Kong-based Harbour Rights to bring its content to platforms in multiple territories across Asia. Those moves helped CuriosityStream initiate its first-ever share repurchase program, in which it repurchased 22,001 shares.

FREEWHEEL TARGETS CTV WITH NEW SOLUTIONS

FreeWheel rolled out a new performance suite of solutions made for activation on Beeswax, the company's demand-side platform. The suite enables more precise targeting, optimization and measurement through deterministic and probabilistic identify resolution within the system. It also lets clients streamline a custom bidding strategy and individual campaign data, while allowing for the use of multiple measurement and reporting options to analyze performance.

INTERNET PRICES HAVE HELD STEADY SINCE 2015

Nowadays folks are used to price hikes across streaming services. But when it comes to the prices of internet plans, those have remained flat on average since 2015. **BroadbandNow's** research found that despite inflationary pressures, broadband prices have hovered around an average of \$90/month. However, if the prices are adjusted for inflation to the value seen in 2015, the average plan decreases from that \$90/month to below \$70/month. Fiber specifically has seen a 39% decline in average price as it matures and expands into existing markets. In 2015, the average plan price for fiber was \$125.83, which has gone down to \$102.41 in 2024. The average price of a cable connection has fallen 31% since 2015 as it now comes in at an average of \$79.80. BroadbandNow pulled plan and pricing data on all of the 2,000+ providers in its database that have been in the system for over a decade.

BRIGHTSPEED SECURES A FINANCIAL BOOST

Brightspeed is turning to a new chapter as it finalized a multi-billion-dollar transaction with financial partners. The money will be used to strengthen the company's financial outlook as well as provide additional capital to expand internet across its footprint. Brightspeed will receive approximately \$3.7 billion in new capital from its stakeholders to fund its fiber build projects. The transaction also eliminates \$1.1 billion of total debt through amendments to the company's existing loan and credit facilities. Brightspeed also will now be able to pursue access to additional funding through NTIA's BEAD Program, in which \$4.7 billion is available across the company's footprint. To coincide with the transaction, Brightspeed named *Michel Combes* as the Chair of its Board of Directors, succeeding *Bob Mudge*, who'll continue to be on the Board.

DOING GOOD

Cox Communications is teaming up with former Super Bowl champion *Malcolm Mitchell* in the launch of Mitchell's latest children's book "A World Within Reach." The book follows the main character Mylo as he travels through the connected uni-

verse and experiences powered by the internet, showing how beneficial internet access can be for promoting digital literacy and closing the digital divide. It's part of Mitchell's Share the Magic Foundation, which was created in 2016 to promote the benefits of reading and book ownership. A World Within Reach is available for free online on Cox's [website](#). Additionally, Mitchell will visit several Cox markets this fall to promote the book along with other digital equity efforts.

SPECTRUM NEWS LIVE IN ST. LOUIS

A new local news channel is coming to Spectrum TV customers in St. Louis. **Spectrum News** launched **Spectrum News St. Louis** on Tuesday, providing the Greater St. Louis region with local news headlines, weather forecasts and other programming in addition to content from Spectrum News+, which curates nationally relevant local stories and reporting from St. Louis-based journalists. Spectrum News St. Louis can be accessed on the Spectrum News app for mobile, Xumo Stream Box, Roku and Apple TV.

RATINGS

It was nearly another set of identical top fives for weekly primetime and total-day ratings among cable networks. **Fox News** claimed the top spot in prime with an average of 2.39 million viewers P2+, followed by **MSNBC** with 1.39 million and **USA** with 1.08 million thanks to the Olympics. **CNN** followed in fourth at 696,000, while **NFL Network** celebrated the start of preseason with an average of 572,000 viewers. Fox News' total-day mark this past week was 1.47 million. MSNBC and USA were behind with 965,000 and 903,000, respectively, while CNN (524,000) and **Hallmark** (326,000) closed out the top five. – Au revoir, Paris. **NBCUniversal** finished the Olympics with a total audience delivery of 30.6 million viewers across the combined live Paris Prime (2-5pm) and U.S. prime windows, good for an 82% improvement from the 16.9 million average recorded at the Tokyo Olympics. **Peacock** had 23.5 billion minutes of Olympics coverage streamed, which is up 40% from all prior Summer and Winter Olympics combined. Additionally, **USA** was the top cable sports/entertainment network in total day and primetime viewership during the competition's two weeks.

PROGRAMMING

FX's new horror drama series "Grotesquerie" is set to premiere Sept. 25 at 10pm, available to stream the next day on **Hulu**. – **AMC+** and **Sundance Now** renewed "Sanctuary: A Witch's Tale" for a second season. **AMC Networks** also revealed that the true crime docuseries "The Tailor of Sin City" will premiere Sept. 12 at 10pm on **SundanceTV**, available to stream on Sundance Now and AMC+ the same day. – Can't get enough beach volleyball after the Olympics? **ION** will air the men's and women's finals of the AVP Manhattan Beach Open on Saturday. The matches will take place from 3-5pm.