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WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Mound Visit: Manfred Bullish on Changing MLB's Distribution

It's no secret **MLB** Commissioner *Rob Manfred* feels rather critical of the league's current media distribution landscape, but an appearance at the **CNBC x Boardroom Game Plan Summit** saw him be more on the nose regarding his vision—and even getting some assistance from former high-profile stars.

Unsurprisingly, Manfred targeted the RSN model, saying it has forced the league to think local instead of national. He thinks that local focus is what's been holding the league back from widespread growth, and despite the fact RSNs previously benefited MLB financially, the Commissioner thinks the current self-described crisis presents an opportunity to increase the league's reach.

"A key for us is self-sufficiency. Because of our investment in technology, we are in a position that no matter what else happens, we can serve our fans," Manfred said before referencing the league stepping in for **Diamondbacks**, **Padres** and **Rockies** broadcasts last season as **Diamond Sports** moved through the bankruptcy process. "I think as we move forward and as the landscape continues to change, we have an opportunity to make our sport more national, increase our reach, deal with the blackout issue that has plagued us for years. And as with every crisis, there's an opportunity to make your business better."

The commissioner, who was joined by former baseball stars *Albert Pujols* and *CC Sabathia* at the event for a "Future-Proofing

America's Pastime" panel, affirmed his desire to make all of the teams' media rights available on a national scale. There will still be a local component of game distribution, but the general focus would be to tear down as many barriers as possible for fans to access in-market or out-of-market games.

Sabathia, who serves as a Special Assistant to Manfred along with *Pujols*, talked from a player's perspective and highlighted the benefits stars on smaller-market teams could have from a nationally focused strategy. He echoed Manfred's candid statements on how the league views RSNs.

"The only way we'll be able to make [baseball] a national sport is kind of getting rid of the regional sports networks," the six-time All-Star pitcher said, pointing to the success the NBA has had in marketing players from small markets on a national level. "We know the [NBA] guys in Oklahoma City. We know the guys in these smaller markets in Minnesota, where it's harder to find that in baseball because the regional sports networks have such a hold on these teams. So, I think it's a great way for us to grow and grow these players' profiles nationally, getting away from such small, kind of regional networks."

As for how MLB will go about growing its reach across the U.S., it could offer access to teams through a direct-to-consumer subscription that would let out-of-market fans tune in, but there's still the question mark of how it'll maintain a linear presence. Fittingly, the subsequent panel was "Changing the Game: Sports Streaming," which included insight from execs at the forefront of sports' charge into the digital space.

THE KAITZ DINNER

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OCTOBER 23, 2024

NEW YORK MARRIOTT MARQUIS

NFL EVP, Media Distribution *Hans Schroeder* recalled a meeting he had around 15 years ago with the late **Apple** co-founder *Steve Jobs*. Jobs had held out one of the first iterations of the iPhone and told the group the device would go on to change the entirety of the sports business. Safe to say he was right, and the meeting was the catalyst of a journey that's now reached exclusive games on **Prime Video**, **Peacock** and **Netflix**, and of course the transition of **Sunday Ticket** from **DirecTV** to **YouTube TV**—all while having widespread reach on linear platforms.

“At the core of all our deals was how do we try to get onto both with partners that have platforms that can really deliver against both ... what’s really important to us when we’re doing these long-term deals is keeping inventory back so we have opportunities to experiment,” Schroeder said. “The world can change around us probably faster than it’s ever done before, and so how do we have opportunities within the context, in the midst of these longer deals to continue to experiment, whether that’s a Friday night game with Peacock, whether it’s Christmas on Netflix.”

One experiment that’s so far, so good is Sunday Ticket on YouTube TV. Fellow panelist *Lori Conkling*, **YouTube’s** Global Head of TV, Film and Sports Partnerships, said the company threw its hat into the ring because it saw avid viewership for NFL content. She and Schroeder worked on a distribution model that’d allow non-YouTube TV subscribers to be able to subscribe. Previously, only DirecTV customers could subscribe to Sunday Ticket.

Speaking of DirecTV, its ongoing dispute with **Disney** found its way into the conversation. YouTube TV stands as a beneficiary since some customers will seek other options from the MVPD, but the results are still pending and might be for a while. Conkling said the fall is consistently YouTube’s best acquisition period with football season returning and the real long-term impact won’t be seen until a few months into the future.

“The question in all these disputes is always how long does it go on,” she said. “It is a time where a football fan has the opportunity to find their sport in different places. The question is, what is the long-term outcome or the long-term impact of disputes like this?”

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HARRIS-TRUMP DEBATE ROUND 2?

The first presidential debate between Vice President *Kamala Harris* and former President *Donald Trump* came and went Tuesday night on **ABC News**, but it’s a toss-up as to whether the two will meet again for a second go-around. The Harris campaign was quick to say it’d be game for another debate in October, although Trump isn’t committing to anything just

yet. **Fox News**, however, called for a second debate before the first one even began. The news network said it submitted letters to both campaigns around 7:30pm last night, requesting to host a debate next month as early in-person voting commences in multiple states. Fox News proposed three options and locations: Oct. 9 in Arizona, Oct. 15 in Georgia or Oct. 16 in North Carolina. Ratings-wise, Fox News led cable networks during Tuesday’s debate from 9-10:45pm by posting 9.06 million viewers P2+, according to **Nielsen**. **MSNBC** followed with 6.38 million and **CNN** with 4.39 million. Fox News also led the A25-54 category with 1.94 million viewers as CNN and MSNBC trailed with 1.58 million and 1.24 million, respectively. **ABC’s** number led all of TV with 19.05 million viewers P2+.

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CHARTER ON SPECTRUM MOBILE OFFLOAD, PENETRATION

Charter grew total residential and SMB mobile lines by 557,000 in 2Q24, and CEO *Chris Winfrey* is ready to continue driving **Spectrum Mobile** penetration among the company’s internet subscribers. But it takes more than having the best price and the best product to get customers to buy a line, and sometimes it is just a waiting game as customers decide on the right time to switch. “The reality is that there’s inertia and there’s friction in the market. I think, as a theoretical max, there’s no logical reason that it wouldn’t be every single one of our internet customers, but that takes time, and it takes literally digging them out, as we say in cable, to get them to convert over time and to eliminate that friction along the way,” Winfrey said. Approximately 87% of Spectrum Mobile traffic today is offloaded to Charter small cells, leaving 13% that utilizes Verizon’s 5G network. Winfrey said it is in the areas where offload isn’t happening where the network is slowest, but it is still plenty strong and delivers solid service to customers. “To some extent, the amount of additional incentive to offload is going to be tempered by the relationship we have with Verizon, and it’s good,” Winfrey said. “So we will fully deploy CBRS everywhere that we’ve purchased that spectrum. We’re only partially the way through our advanced WiFi deployment, which allows us to do more WiFi, but we’re not in a race because of the setup that we have today, and we like the setup that we have.”

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FCC ISSUES PENALTIES FOR ACP VIOLATIONS

The **FCC** voted to issue a Notice of Apparent Liability for Forfeiture identifying four ISPs that failed to submit certified complete Affordable Connectivity Program plan and subscriber data, violating Commission Transparency Data

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How I got **HERE**

JASON
Wood

SVP, TALENT ENGAGEMENT AND STRATEGY
HALLMARK MEDIA



Hallmark Media has a lot in store for the future. The company will have another year of Christmas content and wholesome programming, and it took a big step Tuesday as it launched its new Hallmark+ streaming service. As it increases production and the amount of content it'll put out on its various platforms, Hallmark sought to streamline the company, its talent and the various departments under the Hallmark umbrella. That led to the creation of a new role in which Wood will enter, reporting to EVP Programming *Lisa Hamilton Daly*.

It's been quite a while since Wood has had a change of scenery. He most recently had a 14.5-year stint at A+E Networks where he rose to VP, Casting in January 2021, having overseen the casting and talent management strategies for original features, movies, series and miniseries for Lifetime and A&E Studios. Wood led casting and talent relations for more than 300 projects representing over 600 hours of programming each year.

Three people have helped shape how Wood approaches his role over the course of his career: *Marcia Ross*, *Victoria Thomas* and *Junie Lowry-Johnson*. Those three, he said, have also left a lasting impact on the overall art of casting, but Wood added that Ross' influence actually helped push him back into the classroom to finish his degree.

"It was Marcia Ross who inspired me to complete my college degree, which I did in 2022," he told **CFX**. Though he took a different route than some, the now-University of Massachusetts Amherst graduate is thankful for how college can help in professional journeys—no matter how conventional the route taken. "It's bumpy, you often don't know what's around the corner, you will meet a lot of wonderful people along the way and who knows where you'll end up," Wood said.

Wood was an independent casting director for nearly two decades before his time at A+E, contributing to a number of award-winning projects for Netflix, Warner Bros., NBCUniversal, Paramount and others. Some of those include Netflix's "You" starring *Penn Badgley* and *Elizabeth Lail*, History Channel's "Bonnie & Clyde" with *William Hurt* and *Holly Hunter* and Lifetime's "Steel Magnolias" with *Queen Latifah*, *Phylicia Rashad* and *Jill Scott*. That's quite the list of talent to have worked with, which has led to lessons that Wood holds today.

"There are fewer specific moments than a multitude of special moments working with and learning from a lot of wildly creative and smart people," he said.

Wood's task at Hallmark will be to manage relationships with Hallmark's talent and increase overall talent engagement in scripted and unscripted movies, series, events and appearances. He's looking forward to bolstering the content Hallmark produces year-round and adding to the portfolio the company has built over many years.

"An independent casting director executes the creative vision on a specific project, while a casting executive is charged with shepherding the creative vision of a studio or network and its unique brand of content. Both roles require being powerful advocates for actors and creatives while balancing differing points of view," he said.

Collection rules. Broadband providers were required to submit detailed data to the agency about the services to which ACP households chose to apply the subsidy so Congress could determine the value provided by the program and how it helped reduce the digital divide. The agency proposed a cumulative forfeiture of \$470,605.62 from **SprintFone**, **IJ Wireless**, **Culture Wireless LLC** and **Catnect Communications**. Commissioner *Nathan Simington* dissented, arguing in a statement that under new and controlling Supreme Court precedent, the FCC's authority to assess monetary forfeitures as it has done in the past is unclear. "Until the Commission formally determines the bounds of its enforcement authority under this new precedent, I am obligated to dissent from any decision purporting to impose a monetary forfeiture," Simington said. "I call on the Commission to open a Notice of Inquiry to determine the new constitutional contours of Commission enforcement authority."

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FTC COMMISH CALLS OUT LATINO REPRESENTATION IN MEDIA

It was a packed room at the St. Regis in Washington, D.C. on Wednesday, as former **FTC** Commissioner *Noah Phillips* joined sitting Commissioner *Alvaro Bedoya* during **The Media Institute** Communications Forum Luncheon to discuss his perspective on hot topics such as protecting children's privacy, fraud and AI. The free-flowing discussion even delved into TV viewing, with Bedoya complaining about a lack of Latino representation and the skewed portrayal of existing Latino characters, particularly regarding dialects and accents. "My question is, what is happening in the market? If you sliced off Latinos [from] the rest of the country, we would be the fifth largest economy in the world—60-plus million people. How on earth is there not content that serves the full diversity of this community?" he said. The commissioner recounted a conversation with his staff that sparked his interest in the issue. "I asked, 'OK, who can name a protagonist in a [recent] TV... who's Latino and portrayed positively?'" he recalled. "There were six of us, and we sat there for a minute or two until a paralegal said, 'Selena Gomez, Only Murders in the Building.' Yes, great show. But how crazy is that? It took six people two minutes to answer that question." The stats back up his concerns. A March 2024 **McKinsey & Company** [report](#) found that Latinos make up only 4% to 7% of on-screen talent on TV and streaming platforms. As diversity measures increase in the entertainment industry, Bedoya questions if other factors are limiting Latino depictions on screen. "I want to understand, is there a lack of access to capital? Are there competitive barriers?" he asked, suggesting that data and audience insights could help identify obstacles. "One thing I've been reading about is audience measurement. Some public reports suggest traditional methods undercount Spanish-language viewership. When you use more advanced data analytics, you capture a better slice of that."

DIRECTV UNVEILS USER PROFILES

DirectTV is looking to improve the personalization experience of its satellite-free customers, and it's introducing a new User Profiles feature that can be set up by individuals within each household who stream the MVPD without a satellite. Users can set up their own collection of favorite shows and sports teams to get alerts on in addition to having personalized cloud-based DVR recordings, custom homepage carousel recommendations and more. One account can create up to five individual profiles. On-demand purchases and rentals will also be available across all account profiles.

AT&T ALL IN ON AI

AT&T signed a deal with AI software firm **Unsupervised** to utilize its products across a variety of business units. Unsupervised's AI-backed Data Analyst software has found more than \$100 million in opportunities to be deployed across AT&T, and the provider plans to embrace the tool over the next year to analyze internal data sources and produce natural language query answers, AI-generated insights and predictions to AT&T employees.

MEDIACOM TEAMS WITH COMMSCOPE FOR IP VIDEO

Mediacom is utilizing **CommScope's** Manifest Delivery Controller for ad insertion on its IP video platform. The product gives Mediacom more control over the advertising that's targeted to different customer populations. The Manifest Delivery Controller also includes a Streaming Session Management platform that supports emergency alerts, bandwidth management and alternate content.

EPB SCORES NEW QUANTUM CUSTOMER

The **EPB** Quantum Network has a new customer. The Oak Ridge National Laboratory will now run equipment developed at its research facilities on the **Qubitekk**-powered network. It will all start this month with **Oak Ridge National Laboratory** testing its Automatic Polarization Compensation, a technology used to convey quantum data across a network while maintaining its complexities and probabilities. The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga is also taking part in the effort to validate the technology's commercial viability.

CANELA TAPS QUICKPLAY FOR CURATOR ASSISTANT

The Hispanic-focused media company **Canela Media** revealed it'll use **Quickplay's** AI-powered Curator Assistant to help its programming teams create storefronts and catalog rails that

focus on personalization. The Curator Assistant will enable geo-targeted ads that are context- and device-specific. Canela is the first announced customer of the product.

FIBER FRENZY

Glo Fiber kicked off construction in Frederick County, Maryland. It'll expand to over 4,500 unserved locations in the county thanks to grants from the Maryland Office of Statewide Broadband. **Shentel's** Glo Fiber already has a presence in the city of Frederick, offering symmetrical speeds of up to 5 Gbps. – Some would say it's a race to expand broadband, and **Race Communications** revealed it's gotten more than \$500 million in additional capital to accelerate the expansion of its fiber network across California. That includes \$375 million in equity from **Oak Hill Capital** in addition to incremental debt financing from existing lender AB Private Credit Investors. The money will help Race's plan to reach as many as 1 million locations throughout California over the next several years. – **Metronet** is now available in Watertown and Le Sueur, Minnesota. The company rolled out to the area's first residential and business addresses, offering homes up to 5 Gbps and businesses up to 10 Gbps. Construction in both cities is expected to be finished by spring.

RATINGS

This year's Week 1 edition of "Monday Night Football" reeled in 20.5 million viewers across **ESPN, ABC, ESPN2, ESPN+, ESPN Deportes** and **NFL+**. The 49ers' 32-19 win over the Jets was the second most-watched Week 1 matchup since ESPN obtained MNF's rights in 2006, only trailing last year's Bills-Jets matchup that averaged 22.7 million. The **Aaron Rodgers** effect also helped the pregame show "Monday Night Countdown" snatch 2.3 million viewers. Elsewhere in ESPN's world, it finished the 2024 **WNBA** regular season as its most-viewed ever across all of the network's platforms. ESPN's WNBA telecasts averaged 1.2 million viewers, good for a 170% improvement compared to the 2023 regular-season average. "WNBA Countdown" came in with 508,000 viewers, beating the 2023 full-season average by 113%. – The five-part *Michael Bay* docuseries "Born Evil: The Serial Killer and the Savior" garnered over 6.4 million cross-platform viewers during its first week on **Investigation Discovery, Max** and **discovery+**. The series, which chronicles the family of *Hadden Clark*, premiered Sept. 2 and has all episodes available to stream.

PEOPLE

BOYCOM Cablevision is adding *Reid Morgan* as VP, Operations & Engineering. A Southeast Missouri native, Morgan arrives from **Sparklight/Cable One** where he was Director, Field Operations & Field Manager from 2017-24. He began his career for Cablevision before making the switch to **NewWave**.