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## NewsClips

February 22, 2021

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**The Streamable  
YouTube TV Offering  
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STARZ**

**Politico  
Facebook political  
ad ban blocks pro-  
vaccine messages**

**Sunbury Daily Item  
Op-ed: Broadband  
improvements  
critical part of  
infrastructure**

**Pennlive  
Pa. Gov. Tom Wolf  
signs another**

Interest is growing in an advanced modulation scheme that will help cable operators vastly improve the efficiency of their upstream as they pursue "mid-split" and "high-split" upgrades to expand the amount of upstream-dedicated spectrum. That modulation scheme, Orthogonal Frequency Division Multiple Access (OFDMA), is supported in DOCSIS 3.1 as well as the new DOCSIS 4.0 specifications. However, trials and deployments of OFDMA have been limited in recent years because cable operators have not had much upstream spectrum to spare for OFDMA, due to their existing reliance on single-channel QAM (SC-QAM) channels used for the DOCSIS upstream.

That situation appears poised for change as operators start to expand the amount of spectrum they dedicate to the upstream (5MHz-42MHz, in most cases) through a mid-split or high-split that would raise the upstream ceiling to 85MHz or 204MHz, respectively. The new DOCSIS 4.0 specs also pave the way for the upstream spectrum on the hybrid fiber/coax (HFC) plant to operate at even higher frequency levels – 300MHz, 396MHz, 492MHz and even 684MHz.

While Orthogonal Frequency-Division Multiplexing (OFDM) has been used in the downstream for DOCSIS 3.1 for years, deploying OFDMA for the D3.1 upstream is "late to the party" due to spectrum scarcity in the upstream, Rex Coldren, principal access architect at Vecima Networks, said Thursday during a "LiveLearning" webinar hosted by Light Reading in conjunction with SCTE/ISBE. "But it is coming to the party." Coldren said OFDMA becomes more practical as operators start to expand to a mid-split, and becomes "essential" for a high-split upgrade.

[extension of COVID-19 disaster declaration](#)

[Philadelphia Inquirer Almost 19,000 Pennsylvania voters have left the Republican Party since the Capitol attack](#)

[Wilkes-Barre Citizens' Voice State Rep. Tarah Toohil announces run for Luzerne County judge](#)

[Pittsburgh Tribune-Review Trump House creator Leslie Rossi says she is 'humbled' at receiving GOP nod for open state House seat](#)

Both split upgrades provide lots more upstream headroom. Full OFDMA in a mid-split will provide roughly two times the capacity that an operator could get by filling the same spectrum with SC-QAM. Applying OFDMA in a high-split would set up cable operators to deliver upstream speeds of 1 Gbit/s and enable them to match the speeds delivered in the DOCSIS 3.1 downstream path. In another potential future scenario, a DOCSIS 4.0 network with a 684MHz "ultra high-split" would generate about 6 Gbit/s.

The need for OFDMA in the upstream has become more acute during a pandemic that has sparked a surge in data usage as people worked and schooled from home. According to the NCTA's latest [COVID-19 Dashboard](#), which tabulates data from several US cable operators, peak upstream usage is up more than 50% since March 2020, and peak downstream usage has climbed almost 30% during that timeframe.

Although the use of OFDMA in DOCSIS 3.1 networks is not yet widespread, there have been flashpoints. Cisco, for example, has connected with operators such as Midco and **Blue Ridge Communications** on field trials and small deployments in recent years. In the Midco field trial, started in 2017, the operator had some spare upstream capacity on plant with a 85MHz split. While the use of two SC-QAM channels generated about 25 Mbit/s upstream, the 45.5MHz of spectrum used for the OFDMA piece pumped out about 365 Mbit/s. By cross-bonding the OFDMA and SC-QAM channels, the trial generated about 415 Mbit/s, Jason Miller, technical marketing engineer, cable access, at Cisco, explained.

The recent 2019 deployment with **Blue Ridge** involved a more spectrum-limited situation, as the service provider operated plant with a more traditional 42MHz upstream split. The use of just 13MHz of OFDMA spectrum delivered about 100 Mbit/s, the same that could be produced through the use of four 6.4MHz-wide SC-QAM channels. By combining two SC-QAM channels with the 13MHz OFDMA channel, Blue Ridge was able to put out 150 Mbit/s in the upstream. Among takeaways, Miller suggested that operators should avoid deploying OFDMA below 10MHz, a segment of spectrum that is prone to noise and poor performance.

While OFDMA provides a way for cable to offer symmetrical speeds, it also gives operators the ability to run upstream operations higher in the spectrum and enables them to mix and match with single-carrier QAMs as needed. That's important for a migration period in which operators will be running both DOCSIS 3.0 and DOCSIS 3.1 modems, explained Robert Flask, Viavi's head of product line management and access instrument solutions. Although OFDMA is more flexible and efficient than SC-QAM, he stressed that common practices still apply to keeping the plant clean.

But the introduction of OFDMA, along with a move to a distributed access architecture (DAA), network virtualization and the pursuit of a grander "cable cloud evolution," will also add more complexity to the HFC network and drive the need for more automation, Rob Wilmoth, chief architect, service provider team, Red Hat North America, said. The big benefit is that the physical infrastructure will be in place, providing opportunities to tap into automation capabilities that, for example, will enable operators to execute firmware updates of the modems as they move from one DOCSIS release to another, Wilmoth added. – *LightReading*

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Comcast has again delayed a plan to impose data-usage limits on Xfinity Internet broadband customers in its northeast U.S. region — which sparked a backlash from customers and politicians — this time, until sometime in 2022. Originally, the cable giant said it would start enforcing usage caps in 14 states and Washington, D.C., and levying surcharges of up to \$100 for usage that exceeds the caps beginning in April 2021. The company then pushed the start date to July, after [Pennsylvania Attorney General Josh Shapiro raised objections](#) because of the impact of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. "This is

not the time to change the rules when it comes to internet data usage and increase costs,” Shapiro said in a statement earlier this month.

In a statement Thursday (Feb. 18), Comcast said that it is “delaying implementation of our new data plan in our Northeast markets until 2022. We recognize that our data plan was new for our customers in the Northeast, and while only a very small percentage of customers need additional data, we are providing them with more time to become familiar with the new plan.” The new data plan will affect Comcast broadband customers in the northeast U.S. who are not on an unlimited data plan. For Xfinity Internet customers who use more than 1.2 terabytes of data in one month, blocks of 50 gigabytes will automatically be added for an additional fee of \$10 each plus tax (up to \$100 maximum).

Comcast already imposes the 1.2 TB cap and data-usage charges in 27 states. It’s looking to broaden the plan to customers in Connecticut, Delaware, Massachusetts, Maryland, Maine, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Washington, D.C., and parts of North Carolina, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Vermont and West Virginia. The usage caps and surcharges are “based on a principle of fairness,” Comcast has said previously. “Those who use more internet data, pay more. And those who use less internet data, pay less.”

The cable operator, in announcing the postponement of usage caps in the Northeast until 2022, noted that it is providing free access to anyone via 1.5 million public Wi-Fi hotspots for free across its footprint; is working with cities and schools to connect K-12 students at home; and provides free Wi-Fi at hundreds of community centers nationwide. According to Comcast, about 95% of Xfinity Internet customers consume less than 1.2 TB of data monthly. Most broadband subscribers will not be affected by the usage caps “even with the spike in usage as customers are educating and working from home during COVID-19,” the company has said. – **Associated Press**

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Three months ago, [federal lawmakers grilled](#) Mark Zuckerberg, Facebook’s chief executive, and Jack Dorsey, Twitter’s chief, about the misinformation that had appeared on their platforms. Now, a congressional committee has scheduled a hearing to focus on the role of companies that provide cable television service in the spread of falsehoods concerning the 2020 election.

In advance of the Wednesday [hearing](#), called “Fanning the Flames: Disinformation and Extremism in the Media,” members of the House Energy and Commerce Committee sent a letter on Monday to Comcast, AT&T, Spectrum, Dish, Verizon, Cox and Altice, asking about their role in “the spread of dangerous misinformation.” The committee members also sent the letter to Roku, Amazon, Apple, Google and Hulu, digital companies that distribute cable programming.

The scrutiny of cable providers took on new urgency after supporters of former President Donald J. Trump, who repeatedly promoted the debunked claim that the election was rigged, [stormed the Capitol](#) on Jan. 6. “To our knowledge, the cable, satellite and over-the-top companies that disseminate these media outlets to American viewers have done nothing in response to the misinformation aired by these outlets,” two Democratic representatives from California, Anna G. Eshoo and Jerry McNerney, wrote in the letter, which was reviewed by The New York Times. None of the companies to which the letter was sent immediately replied to requests for comment.

[Newsmax](#), a right-wing cable channel carried by AT&T, CenturyLink, Charter, Comcast, Dish and Verizon, had a surge in ratings in November because of programs that embraced the former president’s claims of voter fraud. One America News Network, a right-wing outlet carried by AT&T, CenturyLink and Verizon, also promoted the false theory.

Fox News, the most-watched cable news network, which is available from all major carriers, was one of five defendants in a [\\$2.7 billion defamation](#)

[lawsuit](#) filed this month by the election technology company Smartmatic. In the suit, the company accused Fox News, its parent company Fox Corporation, three Fox anchors and two frequent Fox guests of promoting false claims about the election and Smartmatic's role in it. (Fox has denied the claims and filed [a motion to dismiss](#) the suit.) Congress can raise the issue of whether cable providers bear responsibility for the programs they deliver to millions of Americans, but it may have no way to force them to drop networks that have spread misinformation. And unlike broadcast stations, cable channels do not have licenses that are regulated by the Federal Communications Commission.

The lawmakers' letter asks the companies, "What steps did you take prior to, on, and following the November 3, 2020 elections and the January 6, 2021 attacks to monitor, respond to, and reduce the spread of disinformation, including encouragement or incitement of violence by channels your company disseminates to millions of Americans?" "Are you planning to continue carrying Fox News, OANN, and Newsmax on your platform both now and beyond the renewal date?" the letter continues. "If so, why?"

Blair Levin, who served as the F.C.C.'s chief of staff under President Bill Clinton, said a hearing could be a first step toward meaningful action. "You have to establish a factual record that on both the election and Covid, tens of millions of Americans believe things that are just factually not true, and then try to figure out: 'What are the appropriate roles for the government in changing that dynamic?'" Mr. Levin said.

Harold Feld, the senior vice president at Public Knowledge, a nonprofit group focused on telecommunications and digital rights, suggested that legislators might not have easy options to exert influence over Fox, Newsmax or OAN. "You have a lot of people who are very angry about it, you have a lot of people who want to show that they're very angry about it, but you don't have a lot of good ideas yet about what you ought to be doing about it," he said.

For now, defamation lawsuits filed by private companies have taken the lead in the fight against disinformation promoted on some cable channels. Last month, Dominion Voting Systems, another election technology company that has figured prominently in conspiracy theories about the 2020 vote, [sued](#) two of Mr. Trump's legal representatives, [Rudolph W. Giuliani](#) and [Sidney Powell](#), in separate lawsuits, each seeking more than \$1 billion in damages. Both appeared as guests on Fox News, Fox Business, Newsmax and OAN in the weeks after the election. On Monday, [Dominion sued Mike Lindell](#), the chief executive of MyPillow, alleging that he defamed Dominion with baseless claims of election fraud involving its voting machines. – **New York Times**



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