



~ Our Network is the direct result of our Partners' hard work and commitment! ~

- Nearly 10,000 miles of fiber optic cabling deployed
- Scalable up to 400 Gbps
- Strategic partnership serves 28 counties
- DDos Mitigation
- Custom fiber builds to your business locations
- Optical Wave Services

[www.penteledata.net](http://www.penteledata.net)  
800.281.3564

**PenTeleData.**  
fiber networks



November 20, 2019

**Engadget**  
[FCC chairman wants public auction to repurpose satellite bands for 5G](#)

Twenty-five years ago, Brian Robbins was an aspiring young producer, scouring the country for talent.

He assembled a troupe of teens for a sketch comedy show, "All That," which became all that and more for Nickelodeon. The goofy show helped usher in a period of peak imagination for the children's channel

### **Reuters**

[Justice Department asks court to scrap decades-old 'Paramount' antitrust decrees](#)

### **ZDNet**

[Thousands of hacked Disney+ accounts are already for sale on hacking forums](#)

### **Washington Post**

[Police can keep Ring camera video forever and share with whomever they'd like, Amazon tells senator \(subscription may be required\)](#)

### **ZDNet**

[Antivirus vendors and non-profits join to form 'Coalition Against Stalkerware'](#)

### **The Streamable**

[Amazon Announces New Fire TV Blaster, Giving Users Voice Control Over TVs and Cable Boxes](#)

### **The Hill**

[GOP senator introduces bill to limit flow of US data to China](#)

### **Pennlive**

[Pa. Dems lose a state senator: John Yudichak of Luzerne County declares himself independent, will caucus with GOP](#)

along with “Rugrats,” and then, “Blues Clues,” and “SpongeBob SquarePants.” Now, Robbins is back at the Viacom cable network in a much different role — and in a much different world.

As president of Nickelodeon, Robbins is trying to rescue the beloved operation from becoming a casualty of the streaming wars. Earlier this week, Viacom announced that Robbins soon will be segueing into a larger role as president of kids and family entertainment for the soon-to-be merged ViacomCBS. Robbins is tasked with not only turning Nickelodeon around, but also helping the entire company craft a comprehensive strategy to survive, and thrive, in the hyper-competitive streaming era.

The challenges are daunting. Back in the 1990s, Nickelodeon’s competition was Cartoon Network, PBS and Disney Channel. Now, the network is struggling to fend off incursions from Netflix, Amazon.com, Hulu and Disney+, the just-launched streaming service that secured 10 million customers in its first day. Disney has enlisted Mickey Mouse, Marge Simpson and Woody, the “Toy Story” cowboy, for its family-friendly, \$6.99-a-month streaming service. WarnerMedia grabbed Big Bird and Oscar the Grouch for its upcoming HBO Max service, and Apple TV+ is hoping to gain altitude with “Snoopy in Space.”

“We have to move fast, and continue to evolve as the business evolves,” Robbins said in an interview this week. He added that for the last 13 months, since he became president, his priority has been to recreate the excitement that once defined Nickelodeon. “We want to get back to that creative-driven culture that used to exist here.”

Indeed, for much of its 40-year history, Nickelodeon has been a leader in kids entertainment. When it launched in 1979, pay-TV operators correctly surmised that offering a dedicated children’s channel would lure parents who would pay for a TV subscription.

Nickelodeon grew in popularity and was distributed in nearly 100 million American homes. “Rugrats,” “SpongeBob SquarePants” “Dora the Explorer” and other shows became multibillion-dollar merchandise franchises (“SpongeBob” once attracted more than 3 million viewers an episode). Nickelodeon was so popular that pay-TV distributors, and millions of parents, found that they couldn’t live without it, so Viacom extracted premium fees for its programming.

Then came Netflix. The cable channel began licensing reruns of “SpongeBob” and other popular shows to the budding streaming service, which Netflix then offered commercial-free to its subscribers. Netflix quickly became a destination for kids. As cord-cutting accelerated, Nickelodeon’s ratings slide intensified.

The children’s network has lost nearly 60% of its audience since 2010, according to Nielsen ratings data. And in Viacom’s recently ended fiscal year, Nickelodeon’s viewership among its core audience of children ages 2 to 11 slumped 28% compared to fiscal 2018, according to Bernstein & Co.

“Nickelodeon is in a tough spot because of the switch to online viewing, and then you have the launch of Disney+,” said Derek Baine, longtime cable TV analyst with S&P Global Market Intelligence. “It’s not a good time to be a cable network.”

That's why Robbins hesitated when Viacom Chief Executive Bob Bakish approached him last year about becoming Nickelodeon president.

At the time, Robbins was happy working at Paramount Pictures on Melrose Avenue, where he was in charge of Paramount Players, a unit that mines MTV and Nickelodeon for film projects. Nickelodeon's problems seemed enormous. Even his 5-year-old daughter watched as much content on YouTube as television. (Although she is a big fan of "Paw Patrol" on Nickelodeon.)

"I knew that there were enormous headwinds confronting television," Robbins said. "But then my wife asked me the question that I like to ask everybody, which is: 'Why not?'"

Nostalgia also played a role. It was his first TV show, "All That," the kids version of "Saturday Night Live," that Robbins produced for Nickelodeon, beginning in 1994, that helped launch his producing career. (The show also was comedian Kenan Thompson's break-out hit).

"It's a big responsibility that I don't take lightly because the brand is so beloved and treasured," Robbins said.

Unlike most TV executives, Robbins has found success in both the traditional and digital worlds. "Hiring Brian Robbins was a smart move," said Eunice Shin, the Los Angeles-based head of media and entertainment for Prophet, a San Francisco-based digital consulting firm. "He is well-respected in the industry on the creative side, as well as the business side."

The 55-year-old Brooklyn native began his career as a child actor in the 1980s, including in an ABC sitcom, "Head of the Class." He went on to direct the films "Varsity Blues" and "Norbit." He also produced young adult shows, including "Smallville," "One Tree Hill" and "What I Like About You."

In 2012, Robbins and his producing partner, Joe Davola, recognized that pre-teens and teenagers weren't watching TV like previous generations but were gravitating to stars on Google's YouTube platform.

So Robbins and Davola built an online network called AwesomenessTV with game shows and sketch comedies to attract viewers who were turning away from Nickelodeon, MTV and Comedy Central. In 2013, Jeffrey Katzenberg's DreamWorks Animation acquired Awesomeness. Three years later, DreamWorks was absorbed by Comcast Corp., which placed a value of \$650 million for AwesomenessTV. Last year, Viacom bought Awesomeness from Comcast for considerably less, underscoring the challenges facing internet-only media businesses.

Earlier this week, in a move tinged with irony, Viacom said that in addition to the Nickelodeon networks, Robbins once again would be in charge of Awesomeness. "It's near and dear to my heart," he said.

After taking the job as Nickelodeon president in October 2018, Robbins discovered just how much work needed to be done.

“The cupboard was sort of bare,” Robbins said. “We still have some hits, for sure, in ‘SpongeBob,’ ‘Henry Danger’ and ‘Loud House,’ but we needed new hits because we live in a world where we are competing with so much fresh content all of the time.”

He raced to put together a creative team, including a new head of animation, Ramsey Naito, and worked to repair Nickelodeon’s reputation in the Hollywood community. He encouraged producers and writers to bring projects to Nickelodeon’s animation studio in Burbank.

“We really needed to get back to having a culture of creativity because Nickelodeon was always such a creative place,” Robbins said. “When the digital disruption took place, I’m not sure people knew how to react. I think it took a toll on people and people lost confidence.”

Geraldine Laybourne, who served as Nickelodeon’s first president from 1984 to 1996, said the problem stemmed from Viacom’s reliance on “businessmen,” not creative executives, to run its operations.

“There was a lot of pressure put on the channels to be cash-cows,” Laybourne said. “I’m thrilled that they finally hired a creative person to head Nickelodeon. And because Brian is such a skilled producer, who has produced on so many different levels, I would certainly bet on him.”

Although it’s too early to evaluate the success of his efforts, Robbins scored a major coup last summer when he landed a project with A-list director Ron Howard and his Imagine Entertainment.

Howard, in an interview, said that he and producing partner Brian Grazer hadn’t had opportunities in children’s programming until the last year when they expanded their company with a kids and family entertainment division. Until now, Howard said, Imagine’s financiers weren’t too interested in developing kid-centric TV shows (even though that’s how Howard got his start).

“It’s fun to figure out what concepts will work and then test them on my grandchildren to see what sparks their interest,” Howard said, adding that he’s enjoyed the collaboration with Nickelodeon. The producers of Oscar-nominated “Apollo 13” are now developing a live-action series set in space in collaboration with showrunner Daniel Knauf (“Carnivàle,” and “The Blacklist”).

“You got the sense from the first conversation that Brian Robbins and his team really wanted to take big creative swings,” Howard said. “He’s giving Nickelodeon a big energy boost.”

As part of Robbins’ efforts to ramp up production at Nickelodeon Studios, the company announced that it had signed a multi-year output deal to provide Netflix with original feature-length animated movies and TV shows, creating spinoffs using supporting cast members from “SpongeBob” and other Nickelodeon shows. The deal doesn’t include reruns of the original productions.

In the past year, Nickelodeon has brought back beloved programs, including “Blues Clues,” and new incarnations of “All That,” “Are You Smarter than a Fifth Grader,” hosted by popular wrestler John Cena, and “Are You Afraid of the Dark,” which has been delivering more than 1 million viewers an episode, according to the network. The new show “The Casagrandes” launched last month and quickly became the top show among Latino kids ages 2-11, the network said.

“They are so far behind, and they have a lot of work to do to catch up. They have to start creating new IP [intellectual property],” said Shin, the analyst. “If you look at what Disney has done, that company has built an empire around incredibly valuable IP.”

Robbins said he gets it. As part of his expanded duties with ViacomCBS, Robbins also will be in charge of Nickelodeon’s domestic consumer products and Nickelodeon experiences, including live shows.

“Nickelodeon is a lot more than a living room television set,” Robbins said. “It is a brand that truly matters to kids and families and it’s mattered for a long time. I want Nickelodeon to be the home for everything that kids care about.” – **Los Angeles Times**



**Broadband  
Cable Association  
of Pennsylvania**

127 State Street Harrisburg, PA 17101  
717-214-2000 (F) 717-214-2020  
bcap.org

First in Broadband.  
The Future of Broadband.®