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February 2, 2016

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From the moment Google first unveiled plans to deploy gigabit broadband service in 2010, industry watchers wondered if this was an experiment, a way to force other ISPs to invest further in their networks or a serious business venture. Since then, progress has been slow. Google Fiber has only rolled out gigabit Internet in Kansas City; Provo, Utah; and Austin, Texas, although it has plans for many more cities. The company's also said very little about the TV side of its business.

On the surface, it might appear that Google Fiber Inc. is still only dabbling in consumer telecom services. But ahead of today's Alphabet Inc. earnings call -- the first that will break out Google's traditional business lines from those [under the new category of "Other Bets"](#) -- there are several signs that Alphabet has big plans for Google Fiber.

First, there are further gigabit deployments in the works, including in Atlanta; Nashville; Salt Lake City; and Charlotte, NC, where workers recently broke ground to start laying fiber and begin constructing fiber huts.

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Second, The Washington Post just **broke the news** that Google Fiber has been inviting customers to try out a new Google Fiber Phone service. The test offering includes several of the features already available through the over-the-top service Google Voice, including a cloud-based phone number that ties mobile and landline devices together, voicemail transcription and call screening options. If Google Fiber launches Google Voice broadly, that completes the triple-play bundle experience, and gives the company service parity with cable and telco providers.

Third, while Google Fiber has largely kept its

video business under the radar, that doesn't mean it's leaving it to languish. It may only mean that the company has been biding its time. As evidence, Google Fiber was one of the more vocal participants in the FCC advisory committee meetings last year that led to the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking on set-top competition currently being circulated.

And, since the FCC announced its NPRM, Google Fiber has already held at least one meeting for Congressional staffers to show off a "competitive video solution." The Future of TV Coalition is **up in arms** about this demonstration, suggesting that it means Google Fiber had the inside track on FCC plans. But realistically, the proposal that the FCC appears to have adopted is based on technical specifications made public last year. It's reasonable to assume that Google Fiber developed its demo around the same specifications.

Regardless of the political haranguing, the fact that parent company Alphabet is putting resources toward developing new video solutions and lobbying Congress so quickly and efficiently after the FCC's latest announcement leads to the conclusion that the company

is very serious about pursuing video further, and about using Google Fiber service operations to do so.

Alphabet may still choose to limit the amount of data it reveals about Google Fiber in today's earnings call after the US markets close. But as one of the company's "other bets," Google Fiber appears to be getting a lot more attention internally than many people realize from the outside. – *LightReading*

The National Football League is taking a divide-and-conquer approach to its television rights. After two years of CBS having exclusive broadcast rights to Thursday night football, the league is splitting the package with CBS and NBC for the next two seasons, a move that will increase annual rights fees to \$450 million from \$300 million per season. Each network is paying \$225 million, people familiar with the matter said.

Under the terms of the deal, CBS and NBC will each carry five Thursday games. As has been the case for the past two years, the league-owned cable channel NFL Network will simulcast the broadcast portion of the package. The NFL Network will also carry eight games exclusively that will be produced by CBS and NBC.

Brian Rolapp, the NFL's executive vice president of media, said it made sense to split up the Thursday package because, "we want as many voices talking about Thursday Night Football as possible." The network, which also carries Sunday Night Football, was aggressive in pursuing the Thursday games.

The high ratings NBC's Sunday coverage generates likely played a part in the NFL's decision to cut the network in on Thursday. "My sense is this is the NFL saying NBC has done great job on Sunday and maybe they can bring some of that magic to Thursday," said NBCUniversal Chief Executive Steve Burke. Thursday is considered one of the most important advertising nights of the week, since movie studios and car companies spend heavily in advance of the weekend. NBC is a unit of Comcast Corp.

While CBS is losing three games, the lower rights fees will be welcome relief as it had been losing money on the package. "It is a more economically feasible package than anything else would have been," said CBS Corp. Chief Executive Leslie Moonves. "I really believe everybody won."

Guggenheim Securities analyst Michael Morris estimated that CBS lost \$100 million in 2015 on its Thursday NFL deal. Mr. Moonves said the losses weren't that high. "I won't lie and say it was profitable, but it was more than made up for in the other benefits" such as being able to program fewer TV reruns, because of the amount of prime-time hours devoted to the games, he said.

The NFL is also planning on selling streaming rights for the Thursday package, although that won't affect the rights CBS and NBC have to offer the games online to pay-TV subscribers. Mr. Rolapp said he expects the digital rights deals to be completed within weeks. Neither Mr. Moonves nor NBC Sports Group Chairman Mark Lazarus believed the Thursday streaming would cut into their audiences. "We don't think it makes a big dent in what we're doing," Mr. Moonves said. Both CBS and NBC will continue to stream games to viewers with pay-TV subscriptions.

CBS will carry its games at the start of the season. The network will have two Thursday games in September and then the NFL Network will carry two games exclusively. CBS will then run the next three games. The NFL Network will then carry its other six exclusive games. NBC will carry its part of the schedule toward the end of the season and because it has Thanksgiving night football as well it will run six straight weeks of Thursday games. "Hopefully all these games will have playoff implications," Mr. Lazarus said. Al Michaels, considered the dean of NFL broadcasters, will call NBC's Thursday games as well as continue his Sunday night duties. – *Wall Street Journal*



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