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I'm generally very cautious about making prognostications based on timing. In my experience, particularly in our business, there tends to be a much greater disparity between when things are invented, announced, or "demonstrated" and when they actually get rolled out on any major scale in the consumer market. That has certainly been the case with "OTT," and I've been saying that for many years; yes, it's coming, yes, it's going to be an alternative delivery path by new aggregators for video, and yes, the technology will improve to the point where it may get to be as good at delivering video as cable is today. But no, it's not here yet, and it's still going to take some time.

What I am referring to in the title of today's column is not whether or when OTT video delivery becomes "mainstream." That will still be some time off, if ever. What I'm referring to is that we appear to have reached a critical point in corporate decisionmaking regarding the course to take regarding OTT. All you have to do is recount what has happened over the past year to appreciate the issue.

We now have Netflix, Hulu, Sony's Playstation Vue, AT&T's DirectTV Now, Dish's Sling Network, FuboTV, and the newly announced, but long anticipated Google YouTubeTV coming on the scene. They all have significant hurdles to still overcome. For instance you have to read the Google announcement very carefully to understand, or maybe get confused as to whether they are really going to deliver the four "major networks" to their subscribers for \$35 a month. I think a careful reading says no, they are delivering "programming" from those networks, but not the network itself, and they will deliver "local news" from network affiliates, but not the network feed.

Of course Google also says it is going to roll out this new service first in major metropolitan areas, so they could use the "retranstenna" approach and have folks simply pick up the local digital broadcast feeds off the air. Anything is possible.

So here's the challenge; for companies like Comcast, which already have incredibly well-developed distribution systems and program aggregation contracts, as well as the clear capability with their X-1 platform to distribute OTT, should they take the plunge now? Should they respond to the growing gaggle of nascent competitors by rolling out their own nationwide service? Or on the other hand, if those other services (and we can expect more from the likes of Amazon and Apple) don't really have the packages they try to imply, or are low-balling their introductory prices—but the margins are

way too slim and the assumption that ad revenue will make up the difference may work for Google but few others—is it better not to redirect the market and stick with what we already know works?

Naturally, the decision will also significantly affect other MVPDs in a major way. But one thing we know for sure: the broadband supplier in the local market is still the only way to get all that video the “last mile,” so as I have said repeatedly, maintaining your plant and your customer service is going to be the ultimate winning strategy.

In the meantime, however, the “big” guys like Comcast and Charter are going to have to decide, as are the new entrants. For them, the issue is whether they put money into distribution or product, which is going to make the most difference? None of this is clear, but decision time is near. – [Cable Academy 2017 presented Steve Effros in Cablefax](#)

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A pair of rural Nevada utilities are partnering with Switch to connect remote areas of the state to improve high-speed communications. Las Vegas-based Switch has teamed up with Pahrump-based Valley Communications Association (VCA), a subsidiary of electric cooperative Valley Electric Association Inc., and Churchill County Communications out of Fallon to provide high-speed broadband internet. “This is a dream come true for rural communities like the ones we serve,” VCA Chief Executive Officer Thomas Husted said in a press release. “High-speed broadband is no longer a luxury — it’s a necessity. Communications is critical infrastructure everywhere for 911 communications, education, rural business and economic development. The needs in rural areas are just as important.” Construction began in 2012 to create a high-speed communications foundation between Reno and Las Vegas. The communications line passes through more than 450 miles of western rural Nevada.

The joint collaboration enables the buildout to extend to rural communities in the state as well. The partnership makes it economical to provide high-speed communication to rural areas such as Amargosa Valley, Beatty, Yerington and Hawthorne, among others. Service and maintenance of the 500-mile, multi-terabyte, fiber-optic network that mostly parallels U.S. Route 95 will be shared by the utilities. VCA covers Nye County from Tonopah to Las Vegas while CC Communications serves Churchill County from Tonopah to Reno.

The rural utilities will develop and offer broadband services to businesses and residents along the corridor. The 500-mile route through Nevada combined with the superloop pathway through California provides the most direct and comprehensive route for data to reach its destination, according to Switch. Switch’s new fiber connectivity makes it possible for schools, hospitals and residents throughout Nevada – including rural communities – to access high-speed broadband.

VCA began rolling out high-speed broadband in its 6,800-square-mile service territory in 2015, using its existing fiber-optic network it installed a few years prior to manage its electric grid. “You have to have a driver,” Husted said. “For us, it was the optic fiber we installed to manage our vast electrical system. Our No. 1 priority is to connect the members we serve in western Nevada. Beyond that, we want to make this great asset available to the other rural areas of the state.” The benefits to education in particular are tremendous, and cannot come fast enough for rural schools and healthcare providers.

“Switch is so proud of this partnership to make Nevada the most connected state in the country,” said Adam Kramer, executive vice president of strategy for Switch. “Completing this critical infrastructure is a game changer for Nevadans living and learning in the most rural reaches of our state.” Dale Norton, superintendent of Nye County Schools, explained the benefits the high-speed internet capabilities will have on the district, which encompasses 18,000 square miles.

“The simple process of taking standardized student tests can be frustrating,” Norton said. “Lost connections midway through a test can force students to start over, and that is not fair to any student.” Because of current slow internet speeds, rural schools are unable to rely on online video communication tools such as Skype which allow distant schools to share teaching resources. The opportunities presented by the partnership excites Tom Lyman, the lone teacher in Gabbs, a mining town of 552 residents, 325 miles north of Las Vegas.

“As it stands, we can’t even run our online-learning program because the internet speed is so slow,” said Lyman, whose school has 32 students in 12 grades. “We can’t download a file from YouTube. It sometimes takes two to three minutes for a computer to change from one screen to the next. Other times, it knocks the kids plum out of the program.” CC Communications began its fiber buildout for residents of Churchill County in 2008 and connected its first gigabit customer in 2015.

This partnership allows the company to continue to serve rural northern Nevada and expand its offering to additional communities. CC Communications worked with the Mineral County School District to obtain a state grant to deliver fiber and Gig services to schools currently served by wireless and 100MB connections. "The most difficult challenge in rural areas is obtaining the backhaul necessary to deploy robust fiber-fed infrastructure," said Mark Feest, CEO of CC Communications. Without that connection back to the Internet Gateway, the potential of fiber to the home cannot be achieved. This partnership is key to enabling providers to eliminate the digital divide in much of rural Nevada." – *Las Vegas Sun*

**State Rep. Zach Mako**, R-Northampton, has been on the elected job less than two months and he just found out he has to leave it temporarily. Mako, a Pennsylvania National Guard helicopter pilot, received orders last week to report for duty at the U.S. Army Aviation Center of Excellence at Fort Rucker, Ala. His air combat operations training starts April 16. "It is an honor to serve my communities, commonwealth and country," Mako said. "My veteran staff and I will ensure our constituents remain my primary mission."

Mako enlisted in the Pennsylvania National Guard in January 2008 and has been a Chinook pilot since July 2011. He was elected in November and sworn into office in January. "We salute Rep. Mako for answering the call to duty and continuing his selfless service for the people of the 183rd Legislative District," said House Speaker Mike Turzai, R-Allegheny. – *Allentown Morning Call*



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