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April 7, 2016

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Twitter is basically becoming a cable company.

The social network's **paid deal with the NFL** to show Thursday night football games gives Twitter exclusive rights to stream the matches over the Internet. What this means for sports fans is access to another channel to watch the most popular professional sport in the country, presumably so long as they're willing to see a slew of promoted tweets on Twitter's website. It's akin to what the television industry has done for decades: Provide live events in hopes of growing an audience while making tons of money in advertising doing it.

Twitter isn't about to stop there. It's considering expanding from live sports coverage into political news and other types of video content, the company's chief financial officer, Anthony Noto, told **Bloomberg**. If that happens, Twitter will have built a bundle that isn't much different in style from what you get from Comcast, Verizon or many of the heavyweight TV distributors that currently dominate America's entertainment ecosystem. It might be a skinnier one, but it's a bundle nonetheless.

It's similar too, to the package of "channels" that companies such as T-Mobile have been building. By partnering with Netflix, Google, NBC and others, the wireless carrier has effectively built its own suite of video content that consumers can watch on an unlimited basis without blowing through their monthly data plans.

All this activity threatens to put more pressure on traditional cable firms that are struggling to meet consumers where they are — on mobile devices and on the Internet. But as Twitter explores video distribution more aggressively, cable officials predict the company will bow to some of the same constraints that have affected their industry for years. "History has shown ... sports fans get hooked on the programming, then the league charges more for the rights, and then the programmer spreads the cost to all subscribers to pay for it," said Matt Polka, chief executive of the American Cable Association. "I hope that doesn't happen, but I believe it will."

Twitter on Wednesday rejected the idea of charging anyone for its stream. "We never talk about future products, but that couldn't be further from the truth," the company said. By Polka's logic, offering live sports and other shows will become so expensive for Twitter that it may be forced to find additional revenues to cover the costs.

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It could even try to seek payments from Internet providers, he said. But, he added, although federal regulators have rules in place to make sure Internet providers don't abusively target individual websites for revenue, their authority doesn't run the other way. The Federal Communications Commission has explicitly ruled out using its net neutrality policies to regulate companies like Google, Twitter and Netflix. (An agency spokesperson did not immediately respond to a request for comment.)

In the cable industry's view, this represents a perversion of regulation — Twitter could start behaving like a cable firm but would be more lightly regulated than an actual cable company. But that perspective overlooks one key difference, according to Rich Greenfield, an analyst at BTIG. Twitter providing live TV just gives consumers another way to watch sports; it doesn't mean Twitter is about to become a gatekeeper. "To me, this was the least threatening way for the NFL to dip their toe into digital streaming waters," said Greenfield. "Twitter is not going to be a competitor to multichannel video."

Recent surveys appear to bear that out. Despite the growing popularity of cord-cutting, only about 15 percent of Americans have actually committed to it, according to the [Pew Research Center](#). Add in those Americans who have never had cable or satellite TV, and the share of people without pay-TV rises to 24 percent. That's substantial, but it still leaves 3 out of 4 people who subscribe. And in addition to being streamed on Twitter, the NFL games will still be available on traditional viewing methods such as broadcast TV and cable.

What the cable industry's complaints really reflect is a rising anxiety about their business model, and a growing inability to use regulation as both a shield and a cudgel, according to consumer advocates. "They're all entities that have bemoaned the role of the government in regulating their businesses," said Gene Kimmelman, the chief executive of the advocacy group Public Knowledge. "And the moment the government comes along and says, 'Oh, we're not going to touch the [websites], all of a sudden it's almost like the fear of the marketplace has them wanting to run back to the old way.'" — *Washington Post*

The head of Idaho's Department of Administration says he's requesting more time to decide if the agency will try to recover money paid out under the illegal \$60 million broadband contract. In early March, the Idaho Supreme Court agreed that a statewide contract for broadband in public schools was void. The justices said the law required the state to try to recover the money already paid out under the voided contract, but held off from officially ordering state officials to seek repayment.

Department of Administration spokeswoman Diane Blume said Tuesday that Attorney General Lawrence Wasden asked the department to submit a decision by April 6. However, Blume says that Director Bob Geddes is still reviewing the ruling. "He needs time to fully understand the ramifications on both sides," she said. Wasden's spokesman declined to comment because of client-attorney privilege, but added that Wasden's office had not heard from the agency as of Wednesday morning.

In the court's ruling, the justices did not say when the state should collect those repayments. "If the appropriate State officer fails to perform this statutory obligation, the State's chief legal officer can step forward to make the state whole for these unfortunate violations of state law," the justices wrote. The broadband repayment debate comes at the same time Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter just signed off on a request to allocate \$8 million for a possible settlement with former vendors of the Idaho Education Network.

House Speaker Scott Bedke and Senate President Pro Tem Brent Hill have been negotiating with Education Networks of America and Qwest to come up with a fair dollar amount to cover the work the companies did under the contract but were not

yet paid for because the state halted payments once a lower court voided the contract. Geddes' request for a delay was not related to the possible settlement, Blume said. – **Associated Press**

On Friday, Al Jazeera America will begin its final farewell.

The network, which **announced in January** it would end operations after two and a half years, will celebrate its commitment to reporting with a reflection on “the key moments that defined the channel.” “We’re marking our final week on the air by featuring our team’s exceptional work, with shows and content that exemplify the truly outstanding journalism that has set us apart,” said **Kate O’Brian**, AJAM’s president, in a statement to TVNewser Wednesday evening. “We have time and time again given voices to those across America whose stories would not have been told in such depth without the attention of our reporters. We are incredibly grateful to our audience in the U.S., and we are deeply proud of the coverage Al Jazeera America has brought to them.”

The network will combine updates on stories AJAM journalists have reported with original reporting, including a **four-part documentary** on the Obama White House that debuts Thursday. On the network’s final day of production, April 12, Al Jazeera America will air a three-hour live farewell, beginning at 6 p.m. ET (and repeated at 9 p.m. ET) including contributions from Al Jazeera America journalists who worked with the channel since its launch in 2013, and the subjects of many of the network’s reports.

“I’m very proud to have worked with the remarkable team at Al Jazeera America, and I appreciate their commitment to delivering independent, in-depth, trusted news,” said AJAM chief executive officer Al Anstey. “We thank all AJAM’s staff for their great work, and we also thank those people whose stories we’ve had the opportunity to tell, and all our audiences who have relied on Al Jazeera to provide them with information they value and respect.” – **Adweek**

Broadband Cable Association of Pennsylvania

127 State Street · Harrisburg, PA 17101 · 717-214-2000
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