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Daily Pennsylvania (University of Pennsylvania)
David Cohen on College, Comcast & Connections

Pittsburgh Tribune-Review
Distracted driving arrests rise throughout Pennsylvania

New York Times
AT&T Fires Executive Named in Race Discrimination Lawsuit

Bloomberg
Trailing Netflix and Amazon, Hulu Looks for First Original Hit

New York Times
AOL and NBCUniversal Announce Partnership to Share and

A man in northern Minnesota struggled to breathe late one night. His wife called 911 from their landline telephone. Because the couple must climb a hill outside their home to get cellphone reception, they fear what might have happened if they had no landline. An elderly rural woman sends pacemaker readings to her faraway heart doctor using her landline phone. She can't do this with a cellphone. A southern Minnesota woman uses her landline phone to operate her medical-alert system. She lives on a fixed income.

These and other Minnesotans — including many senior citizens and rural residents — need and deserve local landline phone service that is accessible, affordable and reliable. To that end, for 100 years, Minnesota has regulated the price and service quality of local telephone service. Minnesota law also requires phone companies to extend service to all Minnesotans, no matter where they live. These laws have served Minnesota well.

Unfortunately, the Legislature is considering bills — H.F. 1066 and S.F. 736 — to eliminate these price and service quality regulations. The bills would allow phone companies to charge higher rates with degraded service and access. Capitol insiders have dubbed the measure the "CenturyLink bill." A similar deregulation measure in another state is called the "AT&T

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Variety
Hulu Sets Mammoth 'Seinfeld' Licensing Deal Worth Nearly $180 Million

Reuters
Google launches security feature for Chrome web browser

Associated Press
State of the news media in 2015: Facebook and mobile rule

zap2it.com
Nielsen Top 25 Cable Program Ratings for Week Ending April 26

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette
Montgomery County DA to widen investigation of attorney general Kane

bill." It speaks volumes that these bills are named after the phone companies that are pushing them. In one state, prices more than doubled after local telephone service was deregulated.

As representatives of AARP-Minnesota, the Minnesota AFL-CIO and the Minnesota attorney general's office, we call on the Legislature to reject these bills. Under the bills:
• Price protections would end. Telephone companies would be able to charge and raise prices as they desire.
• Quality would be unregulated. Service quality — such as how often people get a "busy" signal, how long the telephone company has to repair outages and how quickly operators answer calls for assistance — would no longer be regulated.
• Companies could drop or refuse to take customers, for any reason. This would be especially tough on rural residents, since it costs phone companies more to serve these customers.

The telecommunications industry argues that overturning 100 years of state legal protections won't matter because cellphones, Voice over Internet Protocol, texting and e-mail can compete with landlines. Baloney. In many parts of Minnesota, cellphone coverage and broadband Internet is spotty or nonexistent. Try e-mailing 911 if you're having a stroke.

There are many good reasons why people still need access to affordable, reliable landlines. When someone calls 911 in an emergency from a home phone, first responders can automatically detect the address. Many home-security alarms and medical-alert devices operate through landlines. Some people use landlines for dial-up Internet access where broadband is not yet available or affordable.

The phone companies say they will keep up service if they are deregulated. Yet, these same companies right now are lobbying the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission to let them out of basic quality of service standards, such as having to fix 95 percent of service outages in 24 hours. Against this backdrop, their claims at the State Capitol should ring hollow. – ***Minneapolis Star Tribune* op-ed from Will Phillips, state director of AARP-Minnesota; Shar Knutson, president of the Minnesota AFL-CIO; Lori Swanson, Minnesota's attorney general.**

Every year, Comcast Corp.'s NBCUniversal hosts a swanky dinner for advertisers, as the TV network-owner gears up for the spring's peak ad sales season. This year, there was a new wrinkle: Before they were served their fish and lamb at New York's Rainbow Room last month, some guests sat through a five-hour seminar titled "The Future of Content, Data & Technology."

The talk laid out how marketers can use NBCUniversal's new data and analytics tools to target their ads more effectively on the company's shows. The technology makes it possible, for example, for a brewer's ads to air on shows watched by beer-buying households, or for a fast-food restaurant to target lovers of burger and fries.

If it sounded to the gathered ad executives like the sort of high-tech pitch that might be given by Google or Facebook, that was the point. Marketers have been moving money, gradually but measurably, away from TV and into digital outlets that promise sophisticated ad targeting and the ability to reach audiences that are eschewing traditional television. Now, the TV empire is striking back.

NBCUniversal, owner of channels including USA, Bravo and E!, along with Time Warner Inc.'s Turner Broadcasting and other media companies are touting new tools that they say close the gap with the online players when it comes to data and analytics. That will be a key feature of their pitches in "upfront" negotiations in coming weeks, when TV networks sell the majority of ad time for coming programming. Turner is offering a product called "Turner Audience Now." The network said it recently helped a yogurt company target heavy yogurt buyers across its shows using data from Nielsen Catalina

Solutions, which merges shopper loyalty-card data—a wealth of information—with TV viewing. Both NBCU and Turner stress that the data they use for this ad tool is "anonymized"—that is, the networks don't see the personal information of consumers. The two networks are seeking to sell up to 30% of their inventory, including upfront ad time, using the new data tools.

NBCUniversal is pushing a new "Audience Targeting Platform." It taps into huge databases of information on what products people buy, and matches it against data from set-top boxes that tracks the programs people watch on TV. (NBCU said isn't using Comcast set-top box data for this ad product.) Networks are also making use of things like databases for movie-ticket sales and car buying. Advertisers "no longer have to choose between data-driven opportunities that digital gives them and the power and scale of premium video that NBCUniversal gives them," said Linda Yaccarino, NBCUniversal's chairman of advertising sales.

Meanwhile, some TV executives are going on the offensive, reminding advertisers of the problems that lurk in the digital ad ecosystem. They point to bogus Web traffic boosted by computerized bots, and growing concerns over the lack of "viewability" of online ads that appear on parts of websites that make them undetectable to the human eye. Executives at CBS Corp. and Walt Disney Co.'s ESPN are among those that have been making this case, people familiar with the matter say. "What we are saying is ESPN's digital properties are clean and well-lit places that have great content," said Ed Erhardt, president of ESPN's ad sales. "That message is resonating right now because there clearly is some re-evaluating going on by advertisers and buyers because of what is going on in some parts of the digital ecosystem," said added.

Michael Teicher, executive vice president of syndication ad sales for Twentieth Television said "the TV industry should be fighting back in unison to raise the flag on these flaws." (Twentieth Television's parent company, 21st Century Fox, was part of the same company as The Wall Street Journal until mid-2013.) For decades, TV networks allowed advertisers to target viewers based only on age and gender. And even with its new tools, TV doesn't know as much about viewers as the Web can divine from monitoring searches, where someone might be typing in "red high heels, size 9.5" or "fringed lampshades."

However, TV executives want to offer better audience targeting while maintaining its chief advantage over the Web: to reach large swaths of the population. That's the reason at once. That breadth is $66 billion a year is still spent on TV advertising. For TV executives, counter-balancing the narrative that digital outlets have an inherent advantage over television is critical. TV networks across the cable dial are dealing with steep, double-digit declines in viewership.Analyst estimates suggest that the ad dollars marketers will commit during this year's upfronts could sink 7% to about $20 billion.

Marketers including MasterCard Inc., Allstate Corp., Wendy's Co. and Mondelez International Inc. have begun shifting ad dollars from TV to digital platforms that can target users based on attributes ranging from their physical location to shopping habits. Digital outlets also point out that TV networks have their own version of "viewability" headaches. Viewers walk out of the room during commercial breaks, or skip through ads on their DVRs. Trying to talk down digital channels "ignores where people go for content," said Sherrill Mane, senior vice president for research, analytics measurement for the Interactive Advertising Bureau, an industry trade group that represents Web publishers. "We're not degrading digital's capability," said Michael Strober, senior vice president of client insights and innovation at Turner. "What we're saying is that there exists now new technology, new data and analytics approaches to television that didn't exist before."

Sales executives are also reinforcing TV's ability to reach large audiences despite the ratings declines. During a meeting with ad buyers and advertisers earlier this month, NBC Entertainment Chairman Robert Greenblatt said one episode of “The Voice” delivered a larger audience than a month of YouTube viewership, according to people that attended the meeting. Over the past few months, the cable industry’s trade group, the Cable Advertising Bureau, has been arming cable ad sales executives with information to help their case, according to people who have attended recent CAB meetings. One slide presented to network executives stated that ads were viewed 709.7 million times during all airings of Adult Swim’s reruns of “Family Guy” in January of this year.

To deliver roughly the same number of ad views during that time period on YouTube, an advertiser would have had to buy all views on YouTube’s top 10 networks. YouTube declined to comment.
It is unclear if the new approach by TV networks will help stop the flow of TV dollars to digital channels. “Is it likely going to change a lot of folks’ minds about the balance of their media budgets? Yes. Do we know by how much? No, we don’t,” said NBCUniversal’s Ms. Yaccarino. – ***Wall Street Journal***

Cablevision Systems Corp. reached a deal with streaming video service Hulu to offer the service's catalog of on-demand shows and movies to its customers, becoming the first cable or satellite TV provider to strike such a partnership. "There is a new generation of consumers who access video through the Internet, and whatever their preference, Cablevision will facilitate a great content experience," said Kristin Dolan, chief operating officer of Cablevision, in a statement. Hulu's $7.99-a-month Plus subscription service, which is battling streaming giant Netflix and Amazon.com Inc.'s Prime Instant Video for customers, could benefit from the marketing boost by Cablevision. "Even with the rapid growth in streaming, there is a huge audience that consumes television through their cable provider, and we want to be there for them too," said Tim Connolly, senior vice president of distribution at Hulu.

The companies didn't say whether Hulu would be made available as an app on Cablevision set-top boxes. Cablevision said it will provide pricing and other details in the "near future." Hulu has been seeking such tie-ups with pay TV providers since the latter half of 2013, after its media company owners decided not to sell the company. Hulu is owned by Walt Disney Co., 21st Century Fox and Comcast Corp. (Fox and The Wall Street Journal were part of the same company until mid-2013.)

Cablevision has been aggressively targeting viewers who are looking to "cut the cord" or who enjoy online video services. It became the first pay TV provider to say it will offer HBO's stand-alone streaming service HBO Now. Last week, Cablevision said it would begin offering new "cord cutter" plans that come with broadband service and a digital antenna to pick up broadcast TV stations. It also was the first major U.S. operator to integrate Netflix's servers into its network without holding out for a fee, saying that it wanted to improve quality of streaming for its customers. Other bigger cable companies have clashed with Netflix over similar "interconnection" deals, demanding that Netflix pay up. Cablevision Chief Executive James Dolan has said he wants to transform the cable operator away from its television roots into a "connectivity" company. He has said that there may come a day when Cablevision stops offering cable TV service completely, focusing instead on Internet service for customers. – ***New York Post***

Philadelphia-based Comcast has joined the list of tech and telecom companies providing free calls to Nepal in the wake of the devastating earthquake that hit the country. Comcast said it is offering free calls to Nepal through May 31 — retroactive to April 25 — for its 11 million Xfinity Voice residential customers. Credits and waived fees will be automatic and no action will be required by customers, the company said. “We will continue to keep all those impacted by this tragic event in our thoughts and prayers and wish them strength during these trying times,” Comcast said in a press release.

	Time Warner Cable is offering free calls to landline and mobile numbers in Nepal through May 25. All calls placed by its Home Phone and Business Services customers are free, according to a news release issued by Time Warner Cable today. The cable service is also making free calls retroactive for all calls placed since April 25. Customers won't have to make any changes to their account. Customers who were charged on or after April 25 will automatically be credited, according to the news release. – ***Associated Press***

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