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Comcast Corp may be best known as a cable company, but it is banking on remote-controlled door locks and cameras as well as other “smart-home” offerings to accelerate its growing home security business. The push to diversify comes at a time when more U.S. consumers who are dropping traditional cable television packages, or cutting the cord, in favor of cheaper alternatives. Comcast and its rivals want to offer more services in the home to increase their revenues and create more loyal customers.

Comcast is already seeing traction at its Xfinity Home security service, which launched in 2012. Subscribers have doubled to more than 1 million in the last two years, according to quarterly results released in July. But selling security services to consumers, which Comcast says is more than a \$9 billion market, is just part of the strategy.

The company is now turning to home automation - think standalone features such as cameras and thermostats that can be controlled remotely - for consumers who reside in apartments and condominiums. The U.S. smart-home market, which encompasses devices ranging from door locks to sprinkler systems that can be programmed to various schedules, is expected to grow to \$47 billion annually by 2020, according to research firm Strategy Analytics.

Daniel Herscovici, senior vice president and general manager of Xfinity Home, told Reuters that the home security industry offered certain advantages such as low churn, or attrition, since consumers rarely switch providers unless they move. The cost of signing up customers is low since Comcast is able to sell to people who also subscribe to broadband and cable services.

The company first focused on home security because it was too early in 2012 to talk about connected devices, he said. Now it is also turning to automation. “We haven’t reached anywhere near our full potential,” he said in an interview.

[Why Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg won't be president](#)

[Variety Amazon Expects More Straight-to-Series Orders, Output Deals](#)

[Harrisburg Patriot-News PennDOT: Real ID-compliant drivers licenses will cost Pa. \\$30M+](#)

[Allentown Morning Call Lou Barletta makes his U.S. Senate plans official](#)

Overall, the home security and automation market is a natural extension for broadband providers who are looking for additional ways to leverage its existing infrastructure and workforce to sell more services to new and existing customers. Comcast has said that 55 percent of Xfinity Home customers become new Comcast subscribers. But Comcast and others still face a shrinking market in traditional pay-TV services. Six of the largest U.S. pay TV firms lost a total of 723,000 customers in the second quarter in what JPMorgan analysts called the industry's worst ever quarterly results during the period.

The big question for Comcast is whether a monthly subscription model - one that provides a recurring revenue stream beyond the initial sale of equipment - can take off in a market where consumers have the option of paying once for items like cameras without the extra perks that come with an additional fee, analysts said.

Comcast aims to find out with a pilot program in three markets to offer a video camera bundled with its Xfinity Internet for an additional \$10 a month, a company spokesman said. Customers can purchase up to six cameras for \$99 each and then pay the monthly fee, which includes installation, cloud storage for video recordings and the ability to create and share video clips. The offer is meant for condo owners and apartment dwellers who don't need full home security systems, but still want to keep an eye on where they live. If successful, the pilot will likely expand this year, a Comcast spokesman said.

Vivint, a home automation company owned by Blackstone Group, says it has succeeded selling monthly service plans for \$39.99 and \$49.99. The product includes features such as an app that allows consumers to control all smart-home functions from their phone, and professional monitoring that dispatches emergency services when needed and customer support. Part of the appeal to the consumer is that they can select devices to be integrated into a single system via a curated platform, Vivint executives said.

According to Strategy Analytics, Comcast has roughly 10 percent of the market for interactive security, the category of home security that offers remote monitoring and arming of systems, compared to market leader ADT Corp's 20 percent. Comcast plans to get a bigger slice of that market share. In March, it bought out its supplier of home security equipment, IControl Networks Inc, for an undisclosed amount. The deal gives Comcast more control over research and development capabilities and provides it with a new revenue stream as a wholesaler to other companies in the market.

Blake Kozak, principal analyst at market research firm IHS, said Comcast has an advantage because it is already in the home, with services like a remote control that responds to voice commands and the X1 set top box. "They have a lot of things going for them in terms of creating an ecosystem for the consumer and getting them to engage," he said. – *Reuters*

New Jersey has joined 23 other states and territories in signing off on CenturyLink's proposed \$34 billion acquisition of Level 3 Communications. With the latest approval, that leaves California as the only state yet to clear the deal. The news follows on the heels of [July approvals from four states](#), when Alaska, Colorado, New, York, and Pennsylvania gave the merger a greenlight.

The remaining states that also gave regulatory approval include: Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Hawaii, Indiana, Louisiana, Maryland, Minnesota, Mississippi, Montana, Nevada, Ohio, Puerto Rico, Texas, Utah, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, and the District of Columbia. "We're pleased to announce, with the addition of New Jersey, 24 states and territories have approved or cleared CenturyLink's acquisition of Level 3 and recognize this transaction is clearly in the public interest," John F. Jones, SVP for public policy and government relations at CenturyLink, comments.

The transaction is still subject to various regulatory approvals and other customary closing conditions. Jones adds that CenturyLink is working with the California Public Utilities Commission and federal regulatory agencies to clinch the remaining necessary approvals so that the deal can close by its target date of the end of the third quarter this year. "The combined company will have an extensive global network with a greater range of services that will meet customers' and communities' growing bandwidth and technology needs," Jones noted in July. – *CED*

Facebook is blocking pages that post fake news stories from buying ads as part of its efforts to curb hoax articles on its platform. The company announced on Monday that it would prevent Facebook pages — public profiles for brands, celebrities, groups, businesses and other institutions — that repeatedly share news marked as "false" by third-party fact-checkers from advertising on its platform. "This update will help to reduce the distribution of false news which will keep Pages that spread false news from making money," [wrote Facebook product managers](#) Satwik Shukla and Tessa Lyons. "We've found instances of Pages using Facebook ads to build their audiences in order to distribute false news more broadly."

The company noted that pages that stop posting fake news would be eligible to buy ads on Facebook again. In the post, the two managers reiterated Facebook's stance that false information on the platform is "harmful" and "erodes trust." In December, the **company announced** that it would begin taking steps to curb fake stories from spreading across its platform.

The move came after CEO Mark Zuckerberg initially downplayed the impact of false stories on Facebook. "More than 99% of what people see is authentic," **Zuckerberg wrote just after the presidential election.** "Only a very small amount is fake news and hoaxes." Facebook has since released features and tweaked its platform in a variety of ways to stop fake news from being shared on its website. Most notably, the company introduced an option that allows users to report potentially fake stories as "false." Third-party groups assess flagged stories to determine if they are fake. They also use algorithms to find false news stories. – ***The Hill***

For the upcoming TV season, Nielsen has slightly raised estimates on the number of U.S. TV homes -- by 1.0%. Nielsen's 1% bump from last year's projection brings the total to 119.6 million TV homes for the 2017-2018 TV season. For the 2016-2017 TV season, Nielsen said the estimate was 118.4 million -- an increase of 1.7% from the previous season.

The TV measurement company also notes that total U.S. viewers -- age 2 and older in U.S. TV homes -- are estimated to be 304.5 million, a 0.9% climb from a year ago. This is a slower gain versus the same period a year ago. The 2016-2017 stats show a gain of 1.6% over 2015-2016. Nielsen uses U.S. Census Bureau data combined with information from the national TV panel to arrive at its TV universe estimates in early May. It distributes final Nielsen Universe estimates before the start of each TV season -- typically the third week in September.

In addition, there is an increase of half a percentage point in total U.S. homes with TV receiving traditional TV signals via broadcast, cable, DBS or Telco, or a broadband Internet connection -- to 96.5%. – ***MediaPost***

