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November 4, 2020

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Misinformation.
Then It Boosted Fox
News.

USA Today
TV election
coverage: Some
magic maps sport
too much red and
blue in a too-close-
to-call presidential
race

Philadelphia Inquirer
Pa. goes to sleep
without a winner —
and with the state as
critical as ever to
who wins the White
House

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State row office
racers hinge on mail-
in voting

Pennlive
Pa. working class
voters soundly
rejected Joe Biden,
top pollster says

Philadelphia Inquirer
Pennsylvania's
unprecedented
pandemic election
went 'remarkably
smoothly.' **Now all**
that's left is
counting votes.

Comcast Corp. is in talks with Walmart Inc. to develop and distribute smart TVs, according to people familiar with the matter, as the cable giant looks to become a dominant hub for streaming apps, not just TV channels.

Under the terms the companies are discussing, retail giant Walmart would promote TV sets running Comcast software, and would get a share of recurring revenue from Comcast in return, the people said. A third party would likely manufacture the sets, and one possibility is that they could carry Walmart branding, they said.

The Comcast software, drawing on expertise the company has developed and technology it has acquired, would aim to help consumers navigate through their streaming apps and watch programming. That would put Comcast up against tech companies that already are the major players in the streaming era's living room— Apple TV maker Apple Inc., Fire TV maker Amazon.com Inc. and Roku Inc.

The strategy would enable Comcast to market to consumers nationwide, a change in a U.S. cable industry where players have stuck for decades to their regional footprints. Comcast would be able to promote its new streaming service, Peacock, front and center in the smart TVs, the people familiar with the matter said. Walmart, a dominant seller of TV sets, already has a partnership with Roku to sell smart TVs under the Walmart brand Onn. The Comcast talks with Walmart are at an early stage and may not result in a pact, people familiar with the talks said. A Comcast spokeswoman declined to comment.

"We're constantly having conversations with current and new suppliers about innovation and new products we can bring to our customers, and we don't share details of those discussions," said Ryan Peterson, vice president of electronics at Walmart U.S. Comcast Chief Executive Brian Roberts said at a conference in September that Comcast has its sights set on developing smart TVs "on a global basis." Mr. Roberts didn't discuss any specific deals or timing. Focusing on smart TVs and streaming technology could help Comcast move beyond its eroding traditional cable TV business, which continues to lose subscribers as households cut the cord. So far this year, the company has lost nearly 1.2 million cable TV subscribers.

Its broadband access business, meanwhile, has surged, even during the coronavirus pandemic, adding more than 1.4 million customers. Comcast is under scrutiny from activist investor Trian Fund Management LP, which recently took a stake in the company. It isn't clear what Trian wants, beyond its belief that Comcast shares are undervalued. Comcast is fairly late to the game in distribution of streaming apps. Roku and Amazon together have a roughly 70% share of the U.S. market for streaming-media devices, with Apple in third place, according to research firm Parks Associates. Alphabet Inc. has recently launched a new play for the market with Google TV, a version of its Chromecast technology that will come with a remote control, so users won't have to cast programming from their phone to their TV.

Comcast believes it is in a strong position to compete, given investments it has made in cable technology in recent years, and the vast movie and TV assets the company has under its NBCUniversal umbrella. Comcast has spent nearly a decade developing the software behind its advanced X1 cable set-top box, which was meant to move beyond the basic channel menus consumers have seen for years. It integrates streaming apps, so viewers can toggle between those and channels, and a voice remote allows consumers to search through programming.

The X1, which is licensed by some other cable providers, could be the road map for the software Comcast would put on smart TVs, Mr. Roberts said last month. Comcast already sells Flex streaming devices powered by a slimmed-down version of its X1 software. Those devices, similar to an Apple TV or

Roku, are [available for free](#) to broadband-only Comcast customers. Flex's monthly active user base is over one million Comcast subscribers, Mr. Roberts said on an earnings call last week.

Still, Comcast executives believe Flex has a limited financial payoff and think the company can earn higher profit margins in the long run by embedding software directly into TVs, one of the people familiar with the matter said. The company has said publicly Flex "increases the lifetime value" of its broadband customers, and also now contributes to Peacock's growth.

Comcast also has been making acquisitions, many without much fanfare, to bolster its technology and enable it to expand its offerings nationwide. In 2017, it acquired Watchwith, an operator of cloud-based metadata, search and recommendation technology, adopting some of its features for X1. Last year, Comcast bought Dutch company Metrological, which had already helped integrate Netflix Inc. and other streaming services onto the X1 box.

Earlier this year, the cable giant bought Xumo LLC, an ad-supported video service. Xumo, which repackages traditional TV content into new digital channels, is used by LG Electronics Inc. in its smart TVs. Xumo features will likely be integrated into the smart TV operating software Comcast develops. Comcast's \$39 billion buyout of European pay TV giant Sky also provided some of the technology used in its U.S. products. – ***Wall Street Journal***

AT&T is in discussions with private-equity firms, including Apollo Management, to sell a significant minority stake in its DirecTV, AT&T Now and U-Verse pay-TV businesses in a complicated transaction that would shift legacy assets off the wireless carrier's balance sheet, according to people familiar with the matter.

Under the terms of the proposed deal, AT&T would retain majority economic ownership of the businesses, and would maintain ownership of U-verse infrastructure, including plants and fiber. The buyer would control the pay-TV distribution operations and consolidate the business on its books. The deal could include 30% to 49% of the combined pay-TV distribution businesses, said the people, who asked not to be named because the discussions are private.

Final bids are due in early December, the people said. While valuations haven't been determined, a deal may value DirecTV at less than \$15 billion including debt, two of the people said. AT&T acquired DirecTV in 2015 for [\\$67 billion with debt](#). A deal will not include DirecTV's Latin American business, the people said. AT&T [ended the third quarter](#) with about 17 million legacy TV subscribers (DirecTV and U-verse combined), down more than 16% from a year earlier. AT&T Now customers fell 40% to 683,000.

AT&T has been under pressure from investors, including [activist hedge fund Elliott Management](#), to divest assets after acquiring DirecTV and then spending more than \$100 billion on Time Warner. The proposed deal structure would give AT&T cash to pay down debt while keeping the equity check low enough for a fund, such as Apollo, to execute the deal itself, two of the people said. AT&T has pivoted away from legacy pay-TV since acquiring DirecTV, focusing instead on adding HBO Max streaming subscribers. The satellite TV provider has [hemorrhaged millions of subscribers](#) in recent years as customers have fled to cable companies that also offer high-speed broadband or cancelled traditional bundled TV altogether.

"AT&T is trying to do something very hard," Craig Moffett, a telecommunications analyst at MoffettNathanson, wrote in a note to clients after AT&T's third quarter earnings. "They have to manage a portfolio of declining businesses by slashing their costs, while still not hurting their cash generation prospects too badly, while simultaneously finding a way to sustain a

dividend, pay down debt enough to placate rating agencies, and, all the while, invest in the few growth areas they've got that are worthy (wireless, HBO Max, and fiber-based broadband)." Spokespeople for AT&T and Apollo declined to comment. – **CNBC**

A single voting machine jammed for just minutes Tuesday morning at a precinct in Joe Biden's hometown of Scranton, Pennsylvania — but misleading posts on Facebook and Twitter claimed multiple machines there were down for hours.

Pennsylvania emerged as a hot spot for online misinformation on Election Day. Facebook and Twitter scrambled to take down false posts about polling locations in Scranton, Philadelphia and beyond to minimize the spread of misinformation and prevent it from sowing doubt about the election process.

Misleading claims about voting in the key battleground state were shared thousands of times on Facebook and Twitter — even reaching their way to the Twitter feed of the president's son, Donald Trump Jr. "The fact that we are unlikely to know the result of that pivotal race tonight means that any incidents will receive disproportionate attention because there won't be a resolution to the race," said Emerson Brooking, a disinformation fellow at the Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab, a Washington think tank.

Results in the closely watched state might be delayed because of the surge of mail-in ballots this year, even though that delay doesn't indicate a problem with the vote. Conservative social-media influencers and websites spread a video purporting to show voting machine outages in the Scranton Cultural Center at the Masonic Temple throughout the late afternoon and evening. In fact, just one machine had only briefly been jammed and was restored within minutes Tuesday morning, Lackawanna County spokesman Joseph D'Arienzo said.

Twitter and Facebook also removed a false post from an Instagram user [who claimed to be discarding hundreds of ballots cast for Trump](#) while working at a polling place in Erie County. "The person making the statements does not work in any way with Erie County or have any part of Erie County's election process," the Erie County Board of Elections Chair Carl J. Anderson III said in a statement. "In fact, the individual is not a registered voter and is not believed to be a resident of Erie County, Pa."

Facebook said it confirmed with authorities that the claims were inaccurate and was working on removing the posts. Twitter removed screenshots and short videos of the claim, which was originally posted on Instagram by the person claiming to be a poll worker, though not before it gained some traction on the platform, including a retweet from Trump Jr. Twitter also took action on several tweets from the @PhillyGOP account, which is run by the Republican Party of Philadelphia, and at least four from the Trump campaign's director of Election Day operations, Mike Roman.

One of the misleading tweets was a photo of a poster endorsing Democratic candidates that was hung on the building of a polling site in northeast Philadelphia. The image was shared more than 10,000 times with Twitter users saying it was a "violation" of election laws. Not so, said the Philadelphia District Attorney's Office, which tweeted in response that the polling place is "located in an interior room and the sign in question is further than 10 feet from it."

Before Election Day even started, Pennsylvania seemed poised for an onslaught of misinformation. In October, the state was mentioned the most — more than 200,000 times — in misleading claims of voter fraud on websites and social media platforms, according to data collected by media intelligence firm Signal Labs. More misinformation is likely to pop up as the outcome of the race is being determined in battleground states like Arizona and Wisconsin, said Cindy Otis, the vice president of analysis for the Alethea Group, a firm that investigates disinformation. "I think we will see additional claims much like the

Pennsylvania ones being made about those states as well,” Otis said.
– *Associated Press*



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