Connecting Across Social Distance

Conversations with DEG Members

GET TO KNOW:
Jean Abreu, Sony New Media Solutions
Tim Alessi, LG Electronics USA
John Calkins, ROW8
Michele Edelman, Premiere Digital
Mary Kay Evans, Verizon Media
Mark Garner, A+E Networks
Cheryl Goodman, Sony Electronics
Rick Hack, Intel Corp.
Sergei Kuharsky
Bill Neighbors, Xperi
Paulette Pantoja, Blu
Cale Pritchett, The Great Courses
Steve Rosenberg, Premiere Digital
Galen Smith, Redbox
Jeff Stabenau, Giant Interactive
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DEG advocates and promotes entertainment platforms, products and distribution channels that support the movie, television, music, consumer electronics and IT industries.

DEG can be reached at 424.248.3809, via email at getinfo@degonline.org, through its website at www.degonline.org or on Facebook, LinkedIn or Twitter (@DEG_Online).

DEG Expo: Innovation in the Cloud

DEG Expo: The Evolving D2C Landscape

An Hour With Paramount Futurist Ted Schilowitz

SPECIAL ISSUE:

Connecting Across Social Distance

Get to know these DEG Members. These short Q&As strive to give the subjects’ professional perspective and just a bit of personal information — the kind of chat you might have over cocktails after an in-person DEG meeting. The hosted bar, unfortunately, has been suspended until we can all safely gather again.

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In 2020, We’re All Finding New Ways to Connect

Here’s hoping 2020 isn’t indicative of the whole decade.

I want to acknowledge how difficult this year has been, since we’ve all been touched by the COVID-19 pandemic. My thoughts are with anyone who may have become ill, or who has supported an ill family member or dear friend. It is my sincere hope that everyone is staying physically well and is emotionally able to find a satisfying rhythm and sense of accomplishment in workdays that can feel long, distracted and isolating without regular in-person contact with our coworkers.

But, searching for silver linings as we do, I have to recognize that the challenges imposed by this pandemic and the accompanying safer at home guidelines have provided unique opportunities for the industry to explore new relationships with consumers, and for the team here at DEG to rethink what it means to be of service to you, our members.

The pivot to virtual

We take our role as a builder of community seriously at DEG, and as working from home amid broad quarantine orders became the norm in Los Angeles, New York and across the country back in March, we knew we must quickly pivot to a virtual event strategy, without sacrificing the quality of programming we have traditionally delivered at in-person meetings. I’m proud to say that we have now done that in five live-streamed DEG Expo meetings and two Canon Club salons, with speakers including Warner Bros.’ Jim Wuthrich, A+E’s Mark Garner and Barry Jossen, Paramount’s Ted Schilowitz, ViacomCBS’s Dan Cohen, Google’s Jonathan Zepp, AT&T’s Jeremy Settle, PBS Distribution’s Andrea Downing, Intel’s Lynn Comp and John Webb, Whip Media Group’s Carol Hanley, and many more. We’re pleased with the positive response we’ve received from so many of you.

“DEG is like the industry water cooler, and they’ve done a great job in pivoting to online events during the COVID-19 pandemic,” says Jeff Stabenau of Giant Interactive. “It almost seems as though they’re doing more, with smart topics and a good focus on what it takes to succeed in this business, in this environment.” Thanks, Jeff!

The one thing that the members of the DEG team really find ourselves missing in the switch to virtual events, however, is the post-meeting networking reception, where all can share a beverage, a bite and a chat, personal or professional. So, this special edition DEG Q member magazine — the “Q&A” as we’ve dubbed it — is our attempt to complement the Expos and to replicate, in some small way, those reception conversations. To enable all of our members to get to know a member, even virtually, that they might not yet be acquainted with.

I was fascinated to read that half of the executives profiled here still live near their hometowns. I am charmed by their pets — the camera-loving dogs, and the coy cats — and curious about their interests outside of work. We’ve got at least two fly fishermen, four singers, a couple of baseball fans, as many #Hamilfans, many nature lovers and one (admitted) sour-dough bread baker.

These fun facts give us added perspective on people we usually know best through their place in, and perspectives on, the digital media industry. And that perspective is not left out of these interviews. Consider A+E Networks’ Mark Garner, a new DEG member: “What consumers once knew as a TV channel is morphing from a narrow wrapper to a wide-ranging brand delivering content experiences through innovative apps,” says Garner. “The user journey for television is now a self-led discovery more akin to travel, where within any location one could choose, or happen upon, a multitude of various experiences.”

How about these people?

And, one last note about people in the DEG family. I met Ron Sanders at CES while he was pan-European head of Warner Home Video. He soon returned stateside and quickly took an active leadership role in DEG to help steer important growth initiatives for the industry. Ron is a solid visionary but he’s also fair. I’m grateful for his many years of dedication to DEG and as a mentor to me and proud to call him a friend. We wish Ron well on the golf course or in the Board room or wherever he chooses to go.

Amy Jo Smith
President & CEO, DEG:
The Digital Entertainment Group
ELEVATE YOUR DISTRIBUTION WORKFLOW
With 19 years at A+E, Garner’s goal is to optimize every story across myriad consumer touch points

DEG: The digital distribution ecosystem is evolving rapidly. What’s A+E Networks’ positioning — as a creator, distributor and licensor of content — within the larger ecosystem?

MG: A+E’s objective is simple. The goal is to be a premium supplier of global IP. Our business is geared towards optimizing every story we create to resonate across myriad consumer touch points (e.g. linear, digital, social, etc.) and across geographies. We recognize that the traditional boundaries are being blurred every day. The distribution challenge is to facilitate the greatest opportunity for the incredible stories created by our programmers to be seen as broadly as possible.

DEG: Since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic and related stay at home orders starting in March, how have you observed viewer behavior and spending on digital entertainment change?

MG: Our digital platforms saw the same viewing and spend behaviors as our counterparts in the ecosystem. Viewing skyrocketed during the early days of the pandemic, increasing by about 80 percent and in some instances as high as 2.5 times, and has now settled into a steady state that remains well above pre-COVID-19 levels. Spending took a hit early-on, and though ad revenue still lags behind the relative levels of viewing, it has begun its return to normal.

DEG: In terms of trends like increased streaming, it seems consumers’ need to stay at home because of COVID-19 has accelerated changes that were already in motion. Do you see these behavioral changes as long-term or will there be some swing back?

MG: There is no denying that before the health crisis, streaming services were already trending upward, and streaming currently accounts for about 26 percent of overall viewing for people ages 18 to 54. A large portion of that growth is coming from daytime viewing due to kids out of school and high unemployment rates. Two major streaming services premiered, too — HBO MAX and a “soft launch” of Peacock — in some parts of the country.

In the early days of the pandemic, news genre viewing nearly doubled, while sports declined sharply because of the cessation of live events. Now we’re seeing news programming level out as consumers seek lighter fare and escapism programs. Indeed, A+E Networks grew viewership in both Prime and Total Day, outpacing the cable marketplace. But the power and value of cable and broadcast was clearly evident when ESPN aired the NFL Draft in late April and the 10-part documentary, The Last Dance. Both yielded record-breaking results, suggesting that viewers could return in high numbers when original fare is again abundant.

Predicting the lifecycle of these trends depends somewhat on the course of the health emergency itself — if, how, and when Americans return to pre-COVID-19 lifestyles, business environments resume, and sports seasons move forward. Returning to live production is also an important X-factor to consider. But an informed guess would be that broadcast and ad-supported cable viewing will return to pre-COVID-19 levels, and that streaming growth will continue.
MG: Honestly, I don’t believe consumers will think very much differently of TV five years from now. TV has been, is, and will continue to be where people go for great storytelling, information, escapism, a good laugh, a good cry, or whatever emotion suits them at a particular time. What has and will continue to change is how they experience TV.

What consumers once knew as a TV channel is morphing from a narrow wrapper to a wide-ranging brand delivering content experiences through innovative apps. The user journey for television is now a self-led discovery more akin to travel, where within any location one could choose, or happen upon, a multitude of various experiences. People may start with a specific destination in mind but find themselves stopping along the way — sampling from a virtual content marketplace — to try new things and journey through television to places never imagined.

Content tailored for specific tastes, either culturally or geographically, will continue to explode across the landscape, while stories and talent from around the globe will be the norm. My hope is that as people experience TV differently, we will also experience each other differently— with much more compassion and appreciation for one another.

DEG: What was the last thing you stayed up late to watch because it was just too compelling to turn off?

MG: Hamilton on Disney+. The story of our country as told by people of all cultures, colors and creeds, as we’ve never before seen, is by far the most compelling performance art I’ve experienced in my life.

“TV has been, is, and will continue to be where people go for great storytelling, information, escapism, a good laugh, a good cry, or whatever emotion suits them at a particular time. What has and will continue to change is how they experience TV.”
Trust yourself and don’t allow yourself to second guess your gut. If you fail, you learn ... but you can’t learn if you don’t do something. This applies to going for that job you might feel you are not qualified for, the raise you don’t feel you deserve yet. The more you put yourself in those types of situations, the more you learn how to react, adapt and be a successful leader. One of my favorite quotes about how to be an effective leader is, “Leadership is not domination, but the art of persuading others to a common goal.”

CEO Pantoja has led Blu Digital Group from its origins in disc QC to become a provider of transformative digital supply chain, distribution, and testing solutions.

DEG: You started your business back in 2007, when digital media was a quite different business than it is now, with fewer formats, platforms and services. How has your company changed with the industry since then?

PP: Our original focus was on quality control for film and TV content distributed on physical media. It was necessary to stay abreast of changing technologies, and also to be proactive about providing new services for emerging technologies. For a business owner, to be complacent is dangerous and puts growth at risk. Since 2007, we have changed dramatically. Not only do we offer quality control as a service, but also digital media services, content licensing and distribution solutions, and the licensing of our software.

DEG: What do you see as the biggest technological challenge to improving consumer experience with digital media?

PP: The average consumer’s limited understanding of digital media is a big challenge. A lot of people still do not grasp the idea of watching TV on an app fully enough to take advantage of all that is currently available. The SVOD model is well-known but there is an abundance of services available and for consumers, having multiple apps isn’t always efficient or easy to navigate. New things have been introduced to help this, but the industry is still in the process of figuring it out. Having consumers understand how to work what they have is the biggest obstacle to improving their experience.

DEG: What do you see as the future for immersive entertainment technologies in the home?

PP: We are still some time away, but it is inevitable that immersive entertainment is going to happen. We provide a lot of testing in this area, but all the projects are in research and development phases or are things that would only be used by extremely technical consumers, not the masses. The way stories are told will need to be reinvented to take into consideration that viewers will have the ability to make choices and influence plot and character. This means our storytelling methodologies for film and TV specifically need to evolve and adapt.

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DEG: What advice would you give to a woman just starting a career in entertainment technology?

PP: Trust yourself and don’t allow yourself to second guess your gut. If you fail, you learn ... but you can’t learn if you don’t do something. This applies to going for that job you might feel you are not qualified for, the raise you don’t feel you deserve yet. The more you put yourself in those types of situations, the more you learn how to react, adapt and be a successful leader. One of my favorite quotes about how to be an effective leader is, “Leadership is not domination, but the art of persuading others to a common goal.”

IN THIS JOB: 12.5 years
PRIOR EXPERIENCE: Operations and project management for home entertainment
HOMETOWN: Los Angeles

LIVES NOW: Studio City, California
ENJOYS, OUTSIDE OF WORK: Singing, tennis, gaming, my kids and family
CONTACT: linkedin.com/in/paulette
www.bludigitalgroup.com
One of Pantoja’s secrets to success: don’t second guess your gut.

“One of my favorite quotes about how to be an effective leader is, ‘Leadership is not domination, but the art of persuading others to a common goal.’”
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SERGEI KUHARSKY

Industry veteran Kuharsky on the future of streaming: Mass services, class services, price tiers and data-driven inventory

DEG: You have worked at major studios and TV networks spanning a wide variety of content specialties. How have you seen consumer tastes change over your career, in terms of what types and genres of content are most in demand?

SK: I think the who and the how have changed much more than the what. Today’s viewers largely love the same genres as audiences 25 years ago. But in 1995, three teens in Muncie, Ind., couldn’t make a TikTok video on their cell phones and watch it go viral globally in a day. Everyone with a cell phone is now a creator (the who) and now content is viewed on mobile devices on demand (the how). Those are the big shifts. Thankfully, the art of storytelling — whether feature length or 15 seconds long — has endured.

DEG: Given your wide-ranging experience, what do you see as the future for short form video as it evolves beyond user-generated?

SK: A year ago, my answer would have been that economic challenges dominate short form’s evolution. That since YouTube has allowed audiences to watch a lot of short form content for free, studios find it hard to earn an attractive return on it. A few months ago, I would have asked whether viewers of short form really discriminate enough between user generated and studio produced content to make, say, investing in a Quibi, a good bet. Then in March, COVID arrived. Its persistence is forcing audiences to accept gallery views of Zoom in their morning talk shows, newscasts, lifestyle series and late-night shows.

Scripted productions are in a race to figure out how to produce in a COVID world and this is all happening as streaming services launch and grow, linear declines, and viewers become increasingly adept at flipping between short and long, linear and streaming, small mobile screens and the theaters they are building in their homes. This is all to say that on the other side, I think we land in a world where there’s little utility to common industry categorizations and practices like user-generated versus Hollywood produced, watched versus streamed, first or second window, even new release versus catalog. With COVID, we’ve fully arrived in a world where viewers have unlimited choice and control. Whoever builds digital, direct, on demand, personalized branded relationships which viewers value will win out.

Kuharsky is not afraid of the question “What’s for dinner?”
With COVID, we’ve fully arrived in a world where viewers have unlimited choice and control. Whoever builds digital, direct, on-demand, personalized branded relationships which viewers value will win out.

SK: Over the next five years the streaming market will evolve in four ways:
1) Eight to 10 mass services will continue to battle globally for their share in what’s essentially a reinvention of basic cable (Amazon, CBS/Viacom, Discovery, Disney, HBO Max, Hulu, Netflix and Peacock).
2) Dozens of class services, like BritBox, will find firm footing by serving more specific fan bases.
3) Price tiers will emerge to allow viewers to align their budget to their tastes for immediacy and ad-free viewing.
4) Data on viewing will empower services to evolve beyond just video to deliver fans engaging 360-degree journeys in audio, video, publishing, events, products and of course, UGC and social.

DEG: What about for immersive entertainment experiences?

SK: Immersive is really subjective. COVID will accelerate the adoption curve for VR and AR applications and multi-user games. It will obviously retard great advances that were unfolding in location-based entertainment.

DEG: The past year has brought a proliferation of new streaming services from some of the world’s biggest media companies. How do you see alternative or specialty services, such as BritBox, faring alongside the established and potential giants? Another way to ask it might be — what will the streaming landscape look like five years from now?

PRIOR EXPERIENCE: Most recently EVP with BBC Studios, Kuharsky has led marketing, sales and licensing of content across every consumer touchpoint – SVOD, TV, Theatrical, DVD, EST, publishing, consumer products and live events – for companies including Food Network, iNDEMAND, Nickelodeon, Warner Bros. and Disney.

HOMETOWN: It was once called the “mistake on the Lake” (Cleveland)  
LIVES NOW: Princeton, N.J.  
ENJOY, OUTSIDE OF WORK: 4Cs — Cooking, Cycling, Classic Cocktails and my Church Choir  
CONTACT: linkedin.com/in/sergeikuharsky

DEG: What media sources can you not live without for business news? For personal entertainment?


“With COVID, we’ve fully arrived in a world where viewers have unlimited choice and control. Whoever builds digital, direct, on-demand, personalized branded relationships which viewers value will win out.”
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Grease is a trademark of Paramount Pictures
The founder of Giant Interactive approaches the challenges of 2020 with a stylish mask, meditation and optimism for the future of independent film and specialty streaming

DEG: There were a lot fewer digital media platforms and services when you launched Giant Interactive 15 years ago. How has your business changed with the industry since then?

JS: Like everyone else in this business, we have undergone a digital transformation. When I started Crush, I always assumed streaming video would be a part of it. In the early days it happened to be DVD, but we could see what was happening so we focused on what content distributors would need to get their content in front of consumers, regardless of format. Our first client on the non-physical side was New Video, which was an aggregator for Apple iTunes. And we helped prepare their content for that platform. This was in 2007, the same year Netflix, at the time primarily a disc-by-mail rental service, launched its streaming service. In those early days of streaming, the thinking was the industry would work toward a common standard, but instead the complexity has exploded — and so has the number of platforms.

DEG: With more viewers using more different ways to find and enjoy their favorite content, how important is it for Giant and your clients to reduce friction in this process?

JS: It’s critical to make it as easy as possible for consumers to enjoy movies, TV shows and other content. And we help our clients make this process as seamless as possible for the consumer. The amazing growth of streaming isn’t surprising, given that it delivers two of the primary motivators of consumer behavior: It’s inexpensive, and it’s simple to use. And we see ourselves as an enabler of a truly seamless, frictionless consumer experience.

DEG: Giant has created a number of custom OTT projects, including the online screener site for AMPAS and your own Giant Pictures Roku App. What do you see as the future of specialty OTT services and how they can coexist with a growing number of broad streaming services from major media companies?

JS: There will always be room for niche players, because they depend on passionate, very engaged fan groups. I’m not surprised at the variety; if you look at what happened decades ago in cable, you had hundreds of channels targeting niche audiences, from drag racing to fly fishing. There was even something like 100 different baking channels. So why wouldn’t that be recreated with OTT? The delivery methods are different, but the concept is the same: find a niche audience of diehard fans and give them what they want. They will reward you with their loyalty. Shudder, Acorn, they all zero in on a specific audience that wants a very specific type of content. The big, broad streaming services like Netflix and Disney+ are fine, but there will always be room for smaller, more specialized platforms.

DEG: How is the growth of OTT impacting the independent film business?

JS: OTT is a godsend for independent filmmakers because the more channels, the more opportunities. Remember, content is still king — it always has been, and it always will be. And all these new OTT channels are hungry for content, good content. We’ve even opened up a new division, Giant Pictures, that specializes in the distribution of independent content. We’re licensing content to all sorts of channels, from Shudder to the newly launched Peacock service. So, we’re helping find these opportunities for independent filmmakers.

DEG: What do you most enjoy about being a member of DEG?

JS: DEG provides us with critical networking opportunities and valuable conferences and seminars where we cannot only hear about new ideas and concepts, but also share experiences with others in this business. DEG is like the industry water cooler, and they’ve done a great job in pivoting to online events during the COVID-19 pandemic. It almost seems as though they’re doing more, with smart topics and a good focus on what it takes to succeed in this business, in this environment. I go back to the 1990s with DEG, and it’s just a great organization that over the last 10 years has played a key role in our own success.
“There will always be room for niche players, because they depend on passionate, very engaged fan groups ... Find a niche audience of diehard fans and give them what they want. They will reward you with their loyalty.”

Stabenau lives in LA and NY, but the mountains call when he’s not at work.
Marketer Pritchett wants consumers to supplement their entertainment streaming subscriptions with “mind blowing learning experiences”

DEG: The Great Courses is unique among DEG members. Where does your company fit in the broad ecosystem of digital media and entertainment distribution?

CP: We are excited to have our brand considered among the larger media and entertainment companies. We fit in the unique space of “edutainment” in that content is created to encourage, motivate and contribute to consumers’ personal and professional development. We seek to find that unique feeling of excitement and joy people can get when they learn something new. It’s educational in nature, but not for credit like you get from online universities.

DEG: How is your company impacted by the current boom in streaming services, and streaming service usage by consumers?

CP: Like a lot of streaming media companies, we saw a large increase in site traffic and overall interest in our products and services start in mid-March. Luckily, we had the staff and technology in place to handle the sudden boom of interest and we’ve adjusted our priorities to ensure we are giving our new and existing subscribers and customers alike a great experience while they are stuck at home. The COVID-19 situation has accelerated our growth plans in many areas including content and technology.

IN THIS JOB: 4 years
PRIOR EXPERIENCE: Various marketing positions for The Teaching Company since 2001
HOMETOWN: Dale City, VA
LIVES NOW: Ashburn, VA

ENJOYS, OUTSIDE OF WORK: I enjoy all the local DC sports teams, especially the Washington Nationals, and participate in choir and praise band at my local church.
CONTACT: cale.pritchett@gmail.com
linkedin.com/in/calepritchett

DEG: Given the rate of change in digital media, how will your business look different five years from now?

CP: Our leadership team and I regularly discuss what we want to be in the future and use those discussions to set our business objectives, goals, and help us make investment decisions. It’s all about giving consumers what they want. As our business grows, and the streaming video space becomes more and more crowded, our future plans are to ensure our platform has content that meets the needs of all segments of the adult learning market. Five years from now we hope our platform is truly considered to be a must-have subscription service for those that are serious about spending free time on their own personal development instead of just entertaining TV shows and movies. Trust me, I love an entertaining movie just as much as everyone else, but learning shouldn’t stop after college and the world is a much more enjoyable place if you better understand it. Our current plans are pursuing that goal of being the platform people seek for mind blowing learning experiences that complement their various streaming entertainment subscriptions.
“History has so many great stories of human achievement. Stories that are serious. Stories that are funny. Stories that are sad. And there is more than anyone can learn about, read or watch in a lifetime.”

DEG: Your corporate bio mentions that your favorite Great Courses are history and more history. How does your love of history inform your approach to business?

CP: I enjoy learning experiences that have story to them. A narrative. I think that’s why I enjoy history content so much. History has so many great stories of human achievement. Stories that are serious. Stories that are funny. Stories that are sad. And there is more than anyone can learn about, read or watch in a lifetime. However, “History is in the eye of the beholder” and I always keep that in mind when I watch our history courses. That’s one lesson I think I apply in business. You always need context when making decisions. Context from your employees, context from your investors, and context from your customers. In the end those three parties of people, and how they value our business, are what we need to listen and answer to.

DEG: What historical figure do you think would make a great business leader in our current time?

CP: Great question! Tough question too! I think current business leaders should lead with a “balanced” approach. And by balance, I mean many things. Someone that listens and responds to all their stakeholders — not just one over another. Someone that understands sometimes decisions should be made by group consensus, and other decisions have to be made alone for the betterment of the organization and its vision. Current leaders should be great listeners. They should lead with love, compassion, and empathy and not lead with fear, anger and finger pointing. I hesitate to name any specific historical figure that comes to mind out of fear of backlash in today’s political environment, so I’ll name a fictional one. Yoda!

Pritchett chooses fictional character Yoda as the historical figure who would make a great business leader today.
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RICK HACK
Head of Media & Entertainment Partnerships/Strategy, Intel Corp.
DEG Board Director

As an Intel liaison to the media and entertainment business, Hack collaborates to put new technologies into practice

DEG: Intel is a multi-faceted company. Please share three primary ways the company participates in digital entertainment creation and distribution.

RH: Yes, we are multi-faceted company, but we are a data-centric business with three major ways we intersect with entertainment creation and distribution:

1) **Compute** – meaning the creation, processing, analyzing and delivery of content. Intel harnesses the power of our processing and adjacent technologies, such as memory, to deliver premium experiences to Intel supported devices for OTT streaming and cloud gaming of content. Intel also provides the underlying tools to creatives for compute intensive workloads in an attempt to remove friction and let creators create!

2) **Storage** – with file sizes continuing to evolve in HD, 4K, 8K and beyond, to immersive media and gaming. In addition to all the latest content being created today, we also see the desire to up-res archived content to what the platforms and consumers demand as a premium experience. This ultimately requires additional storage room with next-gen formats and file sizes on-site or in the cloud.

3) **Network** – which provides underlying support for future infrastructure in 5G technology. Connectivity is a challenge whether you are on a studio lot, in a remote location, or at a sports or music venue. A report commissioned by Intel and conducted by Ovum predicted that 5G will represent 80 percent of wireless media revenues by 2028. The evolution of gaming and immersive experiences in augmented and virtual reality will drive new viewing experiences in wearables, not just in devices you might hold in your hand.

DEG: What is your role in these business areas?

RH: I engage industry leaders, technical decision makers, and policy makers to ultimately drive awareness and early adoption of new technologies, platforms and products. My role involves initiating and shepherding the development and design of new scalable business models and industry solutions.

DEG: From Intel’s perspective, what is the most promising opportunity in digital entertainment creation, distribution and/or technology currently?

RH: AI continues to be the driver in so many facets of the media and entertainment space — from the abilities of consumers to have the right recommended content based on their unique interests, to the acceleration of the entire media pipeline in how content is delivered and created. AI even assists the simulation of characters to make them more real than ever on screen.

IN THIS JOB: Coming up on 5th anniversary

PRIOR EXPERIENCE: Consultant and business lead for digital startups; led content strategy for Michael Bay’s Transmedia Co.; VP Entertainment, CBS Radio.

HOMETOWN: Baltimore

LIVES NOW: Los Angeles

ENJOYS, OUTSIDE OF WORK: Music. In younger years, fronted a rock band that opened for artists including Tonic, Modern English, Big Country and Drivin’ N Cryin’. Still like to play, although my 4-year-old is now my biggest fan.

CONTACT: linkedin.com/in/rickhack
DEG: How will digital entertainment start to become more immersive in the next 5 years?

RH: From our perspective, we are driving some of this innovation ourselves with investment in immersive technology and creating experiences in sports within the NFL, NBA, and LA Liga, among others. Intel is also building a volumetric capture studio in Manhattan Beach. AR/VR/MR will have a more prevalent role in our lives as we continue to marry game experiences to cinematic media. I also see how this will grow in the auto industry. Your car window, for instance, could be a window to a new and immersive playground escape into IP and enhanced conveniences in your local surroundings.

“It’s interesting to call upon an M&E exec and say, ‘I have this cool, new widget’, and have them play a big part in what the impact that widget will have on their business, or the industry, once they engage with it.”

DEG: What is the most fun part of your job?

RH: Often, I describe my job as the role of ‘Q’ in the James Bond films. On a regular cadence, we are launching next-generation products and services and collaborating with key industry ecosystem partners that provide unique solutions in various industries. It’s interesting to call upon an M&E exec and say, ‘I have this cool, new widget’, and have them play a big part in what the impact that widget will have on their business, or the industry, once they engage with it. In addition to the dynamic aspects of my role, the position has been demanding especially during this pandemic. Our customers rely on our technology and even more so during the last four months, for which I feel a great sense of responsibility. Whether it’s the film, TV, music, gaming or theme park business, I have been collaborating with our divisions to devise solutions on behalf of these companies for employees to return to work safely and providing consumers a path back into various venues. If it were simple, anyone would do it and it’s these challenges that inspire me to get me out of bed every morning to address them.”
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TIM ALESSI
Senior Director – Product Marketing, LG Electronics USA Inc.
DEG Board Director

LG’s Alessi says selling TVs is all about delivering consumers a greater sense of immersion and reality, and, in the streaming era, serving up content in a convenient and easily navigated way

DEG: What are the biggest opportunities for LG, related to consumers’ embrace of a growing number of streaming services?

TA: This plays right into our strength because our TVs use the webOS Smart TV platform and also have the most popular smart assistant platforms, the Google Assistant and Amazon Alexa, built in. When smart TVs first entered the market, the objective was to get as many content options onto your platform as possible. It was starting to be cumbersome to have to launch each app individually to see what was available. Then, webOS arrived and all that changed. Now we can search by title, actor, director or even genre by voice, and webOS will not only show options, but also what apps they’re available on. As the number of streaming options continues to grow, this capability will be even more useful.

DEG: How do consumer expectations continue to evolve in regard to high quality visuals, sound and immersive features?

TA: Consumers continue to demand a greater sense of immersion and reality for both audio and video. Anytime we survey shoppers about the most important buying factors as they consider a new TV purchase, three always rise to the top: picture quality, sound quality and screen size. Simply put, give me bigger and better! During these past 20 years I’ve seen some incredible breakthroughs in these areas. Probably the most significant were the move from CRT to flat panel and the transition from analog to digital, with SD to HD coming along with it. When we look back on the current state of technology, I think the advent of HDR and the introduction of OLED technology will also be recognized as the most significant advancements in the current era, because of the advantages they both bring to picture quality. I’m constantly amazed at how our engineers are able to continually make improvements to the already fantastic picture quality of our OLED sets each year for even more nuanced picture quality.

DEG: What will watching TV mean five years from now that’s different from today?

TA: The current pandemic has shown that people continue to want to be entertained no matter what. If they can’t go out, then in their homes. This will continue to drive demand for streaming content of all types, and convenient ways to access it. Since it may be a while before many people are comfortable going back to movie theaters, the need to provide the theater experience at home will be even more important. This will continue to drive demand for bigger and better TVs. More HDR, more OLED, higher resolutions, like 8K, to enable someone to fit an 80”+ TV in a space they never thought was large enough to handle it.

Finally, new capability like NEXTGEN TV, powered by ATSC 3.0, is expected to be widely deployed by then, first by local TV stations and later by MVPDs. That will represent the marriage of broadcast and broadband for even more personalized, immersive and impactful TV experiences.
TA: Assuming you are currently working from home, when do you anticipate going back to your office, if at all?

TA: I’ve been working from home since mid-March and it looks like that won’t change anytime soon. Ironically, LG just completed construction of an incredible new North American headquarters campus in New Jersey. When we do return to the workplace, I know LG will have lots of measures and policies in place to help keep us all safe. We’ve been looking forward to moving into our shiny new HQ for quite a while and it will be great to see my colleagues in person again, hopefully later this year.

DEG: How has working from home changed the way you do your job?

TA: I’ve always enjoyed the personal interaction and seeing the people I work with and having the ability to have a quick conversation or walk over to someone to ask a question or get information. We’ve had to make sure we keep in close contact on a daily basis, even if it’s just to touch base. I also have to be diligent about making notes of what I need to ask so I don’t have to rely on my memory.

Probably the strangest part has been not traveling, as I used to travel a lot. I’m less than 100,000 miles short of 3 million lifetime miles on United and the last time I was on a plane was early February. So who knows if or when that milestone will fall? On the other hand, my normal driving commute to the office is about 60 miles each way, so working from home frees up at least 2 hours a day, which is not a bad deal.

“Since it may be a while before many people are comfortable going back to movie theaters, the need to provide the theater experience at home will be even more important. This this will continue to drive demand for bigger and better TVs.”
ME: We’re seeing a balance between delivering new releases and managing existing libraries. For large studios with deep catalogs, they are seeking to capitalize on their content by effectively managing, marketing, pricing and promoting at a time when everyone’s glued to their services. Consumers are choosing to live vicariously through the content they consume as shows like Degrassi and Glee are performing well since kids seek to return to normalcy. Given these trends, content providers are racing to resurface the content most relevant to consumers as the desire for normalcy supersedes all consumer preferences.

SR: Though it may seem that providers may be running out of content, despite a heavily saturated market, the reality indicates that the right content is not getting in front of the right eyeballs. Providers also need to distribute and monitor titles immediately to maximize content exposure and monetization for consumers’ insatiable appetites. On top of all of that, it has been difficult for many media and entertainment distributors to operate remotely without access to the infrastructure required to manage and deliver large assets and data.

DEG: Consumers have been streaming entertainment content at an unprecedented rate this year, and a variety of new streaming services have entered the market. Yet, the experience is not always smooth — for content distributors or consumers. What are the biggest challenges experienced by your clients?

“Genius!” is how Edelman describes a top company sales exec working from his car, using restaurant Wi-Fi during quarantine.
“We both come from a work hard, play hard mentality and so far, our team is all in.” — S.R.

DEG: What do you see as the biggest opportunity to improve consumer experience in the near term?

ME: I personally am an active consumer and we’re still not in a place where we get served proper content as opposed to searching. We read a lot about this, especially when incorporating AI and automation, but it’s just not there to the degree a consumer wants it. For example, when bingeing on shows one after another, into oblivion, the next day when I’m ready to jump in again, I always have to go looking.

SR: Agreed. In addition to that, there’s an opportunity to apply that technology across platforms for content discovery. While there are some good examples of attempting to serve consumers content they may be interested in watching, the outlets for viewing are still so disconnected that it’s difficult to understand what’s available and where in relevance to what movie or show a consumer wants to watch in that moment.

DEG: How has your company coped with evolving work styles and adjusted to remote working as an essential business?

ME: Our company prioritizes safety above all things and our CEO has done an incredible job in adapting swiftly and communicating transparently with weekly updates to the entire organization. For the first lockdown we shifted an entire organization to a work-from-home scenario in 48 hours and did not skip a beat. Then, as safety became a concern once again, our company did not waver and made a definitive decision to return to a 100 percent remote workforce despite our permission to stay open as an essential business. Going back to the office will be in stages with the commercial sales and marketing team likely returning in 2021.

IN THIS JOB: 7.5 years
PRIOR EXPERIENCE: SVP WW Tech Ops 20th Century Fox
HOMETOWN: Westlake Village, Calif.
LIVES NOW: Farmhouse in the hills
ENJOYS, OUTSIDE OF WORK: Anything outdoors
CONTACT: hello@premieredigital.net
linkedin.com/in/steve-rosenberg-8377a06

“Boundaryless” pandemic days create more opportunity for work-life balance, says Rosenberg.
“WFH has catapulted our team in a tremendous way. As a team, we are able to recognize each other as more than professionals. The extent of individuals’ hard work becomes more apparent against the backdrop of childcare, daily chores and everyday life.” — M.E.

DEG: How has working from home changed the way you do your jobs — individually and as a team?

ME: WFH has catapulted our team in a tremendous way. As a team, we are able to recognize each other as more than professionals. The extent of individuals’ hard work becomes more apparent against the backdrop of childcare, daily chores and everyday life. With that in mind, we have been able to also collaborate more effectively via chat, email, Google hangouts, Zoom, texts, Facetime and good old phone calls. And most important, we laugh A LOT. The pandemic has taught us that life is short, so you have to laugh.

SR: First, I’m thankful that we’re able to continue operating and serving our clients during this crazy time. The boundaryless days have both pros and cons but the flexibility of remote working has helped create more work-life balance, productivity and collaboration through an increased respect for our team as people, as Michele mentioned, and our additional efforts to stay connected. Though Zooming doesn’t replace our interactions in the office, we have found ways to bond virtually like our cocktail hour ... who can argue with that?

DEG: What do you see as the biggest opportunity to improve your staff’s experience in the current situation?

SR: As difficult as it has been to connect through virtual interactions, the conversations arising through this pandemic and the opportunity to have more personal interactions have allowed our business to work together more. As a result, this has been a prime moment to create a space for professional growth including emotional intelligence, self-awareness and other meaningful items. I spend much more quality time with Steve, and it’s been a great time learning new things.

DEG: What’s the most fun you’ve had working together?

ME: When we left the office at the beginning of March, I had only been at the company for six months, which by the length of my career is not a lot of time. And Steve called it — our Friday themed cocktail hours are the best with themes like rainbows, fancy dress-up, zany accessories and show and tell. We’ve been able to get to know the team through the stories behind their outfits and their highlights of the week. One of my favorite unforgettable moments was discovering our top sales exec was working from his car and using McDonald’s Wi-Fi. My response: Genius! Why he works for us!

SR: It’s hard to pick out just one thing as Michele brings great energy every day, no matter what’s happening. We both come from a work hard, play hard mentality and so far, our team is all in. And without Michele, happy hour wouldn’t be themed and none of us would have Premiere socks![1]
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DEG: Streaming service launches seem to dominate the headlines in the past year, and Redbox does have its own digital services with Redbox on Demand and Free Live TV. But just because we don’t hear about it as much, can you give us a quick update on your DVD and Blu-ray rental business and consumer engagement with the kiosks?

GS: As our On Demand and Free Live TV offerings continue to grow and expand, our physical business remains the lion’s share of our business. Our physical presence at retailers where consumers shop every day, including essential businesses throughout the pandemic, has provided families with an affordable movie night escape during this time.

With 41,000 kiosks at major retailers around the U.S. with an attractive price point, we can sometimes be the only way that a consumer can afford to watch a movie. We love being able to make access available to consumers no matter what their socioeconomic standing is, not just those that have high disposable income.

Smith says a top pandemic priority for Redbox has been enabling touch-free rentals at kiosks.
DEG: Looking across all of Redbox’s entertainment delivery businesses, how have the novel coronavirus pandemic and the accompanying stay-at-home orders and economic downturn changed the way consumers use your services? Any surprises?

GS: The biggest surprise is how quickly we were able to adapt to a new reality of how we work in the field to service our kiosks and shift from our three main corporate offices and work from home. I am proud of how the team came together and made the shift so quickly.

Our first priority has been the health and well-being of our employees and customers. For employees, this was instituting new protocols to protect them and securing requisite PPE for them to continue to service the kiosk. For customers, we launched touch-free rentals at the kiosk so they could transact leveraging their phones and their payment cards and not touching the kiosk in any way.

Perhaps not surprising, our on-demand business exploded in March and the growth has continued over the past few months both on traditional transactional experiences like VOD and EST as well as PVOD. As we think about an economic downturn and an uncertain content landscape with exhibitors closed, we think we are well situated to satiate consumer demand for content by bringing in Redbox Entertainment titles like Capone and Becky, or offering the best prices in the industry on the latest movies that consumers may have missed during the height of the stay at home orders.

DEG: Like Netflix and other large streamers, you have a large amount of consumer data to draw on when making programming decisions. Do you see a day when Redbox originals become a meaningful part of your content offering?

GS: We remain a critical channel for majors and indies, reaching 40 million consumers across the U.S. with their content, but also believe consumers want more. Over the past 18 years, we have built a deep and loyal consumer base and we know the types of movies they enjoy and who they want to see.

Redbox Entertainment provides us a way to fill in the gaps in release schedule in key genres with our own movies, making them available digitally, on physical and through streaming. Our goal is to release two to three titles each month and we will be announcing a new slate of projects in our pipeline soon to help us move towards this goal.

DEG: Assuming you are able to get any down time, what is your favorite way to watch movies and TV at home?

GS: This probably won’t surprise you, but I love the physical 4K experience for movies. While not quite as good as the theatrical experience, it allows for a more wholesome enjoyment of the content in a format it was created for. For TV, it is usually streaming through one of our Roku or Amazon devices.

DEG: Who is your go-to person or media source for content recommendations?

GS: I started using Redbox in 2008 so my rental history allows for some great recommendations on content that I may have otherwise missed. Before home entertainment, Deadline is my go-to for information on what I might like in our windows.

“With family is where I spend most of my time outside of work. Philanthropy and giving back as a family have always been a priority. We take this responsibility very seriously in light of all we have been given. Our giving is centered in areas we feel we can make the most impact — at our church and through nonprofits that support women, children, education and the homeless.

Also, in light of the recent nationwide awakening for the Black Lives Matter movement, I have had great but hard conversations with friends and colleagues with different life experiences than mine. All of these efforts have been very meaningful for me and have expanded my understanding of and responsibility to driving change.”
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Digital transactional service ROW8’s CEO sees quarantined consumers becoming more sophisticated about their digital media options

DEG: ROW8 as a service is extremely focused on consumer satisfaction. How and why did you develop the Movie Love Guarantee?

JC: As a response to what we saw is a critical disadvantage for transactional consumption vs. subscription consumption — the switching cost and risk of purchase remorse.

DEG: There’s been a lot happening in the distribution of digital media since the pandemic started and people began staying at home. In your experience, how much do consumers understand about the variety of ways and windows in which new release movies are available (PVOD vs. PEST/EEST vs. TVOD vs. EST vs. SVOD vs. AVOD, etc.)?

JC: I think there’s a growing appreciation of the differences among those models, as consumers find it ever more challenging to find everything under a single, or even several, subscriptions (due to the general content unbundling trend and vertical integration that has rights being pulled back). Movie discovery has been even further challenged by the onslaught of endless amounts of episodic television and other forms of content competing for attention.

DEG: What do you think will be the opportunities afforded by what appears to be real change coming to the theatrical window?

JC: For a new release-oriented service like ours, finally seeing studios make progress on making movies available to consumers while the marketing message resonates should mean more mid-size films with larger marketing campaigns can get greenlit, and not have to be sold straight into SVOD. So, more films on a windowed distribution path coming to ROW8 and our competitors. And even aside from that, it seems likely that the entire transactional category will be poised for a nice lift, simply by virtue of solving our unique industry pain-point and finally allowing consumers to access the content while it is at the peak of its interest.

DEG: How has the widespread move to work from home changed the way you do your job?

JC: Everyone on our team is working harder, with less downtime for commuting, casual conversations, etc., and longer days overall. Even with that, on balance, people seem to be preferring this new style of work. It will be interesting to see to what extent traditional behaviors ever return. We’ll certainly be looking to move to smaller office space overall later in the year!

DEG: What has been your most satisfying pandemic viewing – the movie or show that you stayed up late to watch because it was just too compelling to turn off?

JC: I finally got to watch The Last Dance — hugely compelling and a great escape from the deluge of pandemic and political news!
Calkins says the ROW8 team seems to have developed an affinity for working remotely in quarantine, despite longer days.

“For a new-release oriented service like ours, finally seeing studios make progress on making movies available to consumers while the marketing message resonates should mean more mid-size films with larger marketing campaigns can get greenlit, and not have to be sold straight into SVOD.”
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Sony’s Goodman says the electronics company is well-suited to support diverse female technology leaders

DEG: What are the biggest opportunities for Sony devices, related to consumers’ embrace of a growing number of streaming services?

CG: All connected devices are experiencing off-the-charts use cases given the increased demand for virtual experiences. By partnering with Google for the Android TV platform on Sony TVs and smartphones, Sony products have the very latest apps from new streaming services such as Disney+, HBO MAX and Peacock, giving our customers the most choices in the rapidly evolving streaming video landscape. With many people staying at home, TV viewing time has increased, and the smart TV is the easiest, most convenient way to watch movies and TV shows whether they are from apps, cable TV or free over-the-air TV.

DEG: What best practices have you seen in Sony’s aligned businesses, like music and video games, that you think can benefit digital media distribution (movies and TV)?

CG: By working closely with Sony Music, we have successfully launched new media formats, such as 360 Reality Audio, with an end-to-end story that includes Sony headphones, speakers and other products. A similar collaboration with Sony Pictures brought IMAX Enhanced movies from Sony Pictures Entertainment exclusively to IMAX-Enhanced Sony TVs.
CG: It would be refreshing to see more women in leadership roles driving technology. I have a specific desire to support women in technology and life sciences, given the sheer economic power of these markets. The mindset for this should be as aggressive as an emerging market opportunity. Tech education that starts early helps us all achieve success. Leveraging platforms such as KOOV and other coding technologies, I believe Sony is well suited to support the proliferation of more diverse female technology leaders.

In addition to tech education, we need national legislation, like California’s State Bill 826, which mandates that all publicly held domestic or foreign corporations with principal executive offices in California have one or two more female directors by December 31, 2021. We have all seen the many studies that show corporations with women directors are more profitable, so this is a push that should be happening now.

DEG: You have been active in developing women as business leaders, through your work with Athena, DEG’s Canon Club and others. How would you like the corporate landscape for women to look different five years from now?

CG: I would like to spotlight two mentors who have helped guide my career. First would be Karen Fisher, head of investor relations for many IPOs. Karen’s a true class act, the type of person who genuinely wants to see women succeed, who goes out of her way to lend a helping hand. She is caring enough to be truthful in feedback, focusing on what one needs to do to rise in their career. Giving tough advice isn’t easy but Karen’s feedback shaped me as executive. She has opened many doors for me over my career, and has done so with incredible grace, humor, humility and thoughtfulness.

My second mentor is Michael Robertson, Founder of mp3.com. Michael is a business leader who has the uncanny ability to see around corners, as far as tech trends are concerned. He never saw gender or race, focusing solely on ability and potential, ensuring equal treatment across the board for his entire team. He enforced some difficult standards, but was consistent for all his leaders, offering transparency, authenticity and growth through direct leadership and direct feedback.

DEG: Who had the most impact as a mentor of yours?

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DEG: After the killing of George Floyd, Sony observed 8 minutes and 46 seconds of silence every Friday morning in June in support of people who face injustice, violence and discrimination. How does this reflect Sony’s broader efforts on behalf of vulnerable communities?

CG: Sony is committed to promoting and fostering an environment of inclusiveness, while increasing the awareness of our culture. Our leadership and employee groups act as strategic business partners, providing solutions and market insights of Sony’s Black employees. We encourage individual and collective growth through various resources and networking opportunities, focusing on recruitment, retention, employee engagement and community initiatives, while enabling Black employees to successfully navigate their career journey. We create an environment to help employees feel supported and valued.

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“I have a specific desire to support women in technology and life sciences, given the sheer economic power of these markets. The mindset for this should be as aggressive as an emerging market opportunity.”
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Relationships can be an important benefit to long tenure with one company, says Sony NMS sales leader

**DEG:** Consumers have been streaming entertainment content at an unprecedented rate this year, and a variety of new streaming services have entered the market. Yet, the experience is not always smooth. What do you see as the biggest opportunity to improve consumer experience in the near term?

_JA:_ With many of us sheltering in place due to the pandemic, shared internet connections are under increased strain. It is critical to have a well thought out CDN strategy to get content on as many screens as possible. Additionally, emerging next generation encoding standards such as H.265 and AV1 enable streaming higher quality video using less bandwidth. Today, support for these video coding formats is not yet ubiquitous, but content owners should be aware that their use can have a positive impact on the streaming experience as well as on distribution costs. Sony NMS supports both H.265 and AV1 and we’ve seen our clients look to these as an opportunity to improve their consumer experiences.

**DEG:** Deloitte just said that American consumers now subscribe to four streaming services on average. As that number increases, does churn become a bigger challenge? What can services do to reduce churn?

_JA:_ Churn is a challenge for both the “giants” — Netflix, Peacock, Apple TV+, HBO Max — and independent content owners or niche players. For the majors, they have the means to recommend new content and provide high-quality content to replace out of season content. For the rights holders that have smaller libraries, or a niche fan base, it’s critical to distinguish your value to gain and retain customers so that your subscription is harder to quit. At NMS, what we have seen work really well for our OTT clients is when they continue to provide value to their customers via ecommerce options such as physical or digital tie-ins, merchandising, or some sort of integration to their brand such as membership discounts. It’s important to inspire future engagement beyond the streaming service.
Abreu moved from the physical supply chain to digital in 2012.
JA: Get into this business because you love content, technology, data and a fast-paced environment. Seek out women and men that you admire professionally and personally. When I started in physical media, I was often the only woman in the room. It was intimidating but I realized that I possessed skills that a lot of the men didn’t … I listen, I care, and I don’t back down.

I've had incredible mentors throughout my career both at Sony and in the entertainment space. There are a lot of talented and respected women that I admire who probably don’t realize the impact they had on me: Darcy Antonellis, CEO of Vubiquity; Tricia Lee, Head of Product at Quibi; Heidi Turk, SVP NBCU; and Kira Baca, CRO for Rightsline. Incidentally, I was hired at NMS by Kira and she is an incredible businesswoman, mentor and mother.
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MARY KAY EVANS
VP Marketing, Verizon Media

Marketing maven Evans believes the winners in today’s crowded streaming landscape will deliver highly dynamic and personalized ads that enhance the quality of consumer experiences

DEG: Some analysts have noted that the economic impact from COVID-19 is accelerating shifts in the media landscape with cord cutting quickening and streaming rising. Would you agree? And what impact is this having on your business?

MKE: There is no doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the shift that was already happening in the industry towards digital. Consumers are continuing to add more services including SVOD and AVOD services to get access to new content and viewing experiences. They are trying new media and entertainment options that have been enabled or accelerated by the crisis and their choices today could continue to shape the industry for the next decade.

The traffic on Verizon Media’s network, CDN, and Media Platform has noticeably increased. On-demand streaming of premium content, live news and software downloads have accelerated in the wake of no live sports or events. With the re-emergence of live sports, streaming will continue to increase, and we have heavily invested in the tooling, systems, and services needed to help some of the largest companies in the world to deliver live events in the highest quality and at scale to global audiences. Streaming will only continue to increase once live events return and we’re ready.

DEG: What will be the biggest opportunity, or challenge, in five years?

MKE: Consumers want access to high-quality viewing experiences on their terms and broadcasters and advertisers alike must evolve to make sure their offering is easily accessible and meets this demand. The winners in today’s crowded streaming landscape will be the companies that can best address consumer needs and have the tools to ensure users receive highly dynamic and personalized ads that enhance the quality of experiences. Adapting to changing consumption habits by utilizing a combination of different revenue streams that reduce the risks associated with relying on a single business model gives streaming services the flexibility to be successful.

DEG: Consumers have been streaming entertainment content at an unprecedented rate this year, and a variety of new streaming services have entered the market. Yet, the experience is not always smooth. What do you see as the biggest opportunity to improve consumer experience in the near term?

MKE: The streaming video ecosystem is complex and each and every aspect impacts the viewer experience, from the user interface to content delivery and advertising. Ensuring the viewer receives a personalized experience is the key to success. Optimized delivery and playback, intelligent recommendations and personalized advertising, all of these must come together seamlessly.
Evans’ advice to anyone just starting a career: remember that everyone sees things from a different perspective.

DEG: How has your role as a company leader changed since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic?

MKE: While this time is challenging on so many levels, it’s also an opportunity to rise and be a better leader for our teams. We are managing a global crisis while moving the business forward at the same time, and it has never been more important to put the team first. Having leaders with character that are committed to values we can believe in makes all the difference. It has been incredibly inspiring to see how Verizon and many other companies are using their services, infrastructure, products, equipment, and expertise to fight the pandemic and help their employees and customers get through this crisis.

DEG: In the current environment, what business advice would you pass along to someone just starting a career?

MKE: It is good to try new things and it is important to learn that it is OK to get things wrong in order to move forward. It is also important to remember that everyone sees things from a different perspective, and all of those viewpoints matter. Learning to listen to all the voices around you is one of the most essential skills you can acquire, and the only way to action real change in the business world. We are all responsible for being the change we want to see, and even if you are not the problem, we have to be part of the solution to move forward.

“We are managing a global crisis while moving the business forward at the same time, and it has never been more important to put the team first. Having leaders with character that are committed to values we can believe in makes all the difference.”
**BILL NEIGHBORS**

SVP, GM - Cinema, Digital Media & Streaming Solutions
XPERI - DTS, TiVo, Imax Enhanced

*Xperi leader Neighbors sees consumers gravitating to trusted brands in time of economic uncertainty*

**DEG: From Xperi’s perspective, what are the biggest challenges to the growth of streaming video?**

**BN:** Growth of streaming media is inexorable. Overall consumption continues to grow. Our recently released TiVo Video Trends Report shows a 58 percent increase in viewership overall with the average household subscribing to 6.9 video services. That said, consumers tell us they are becoming overwhelmed by choice in a hyper-competitive streaming market. This overwhelming choice may result in chaos, which in a post-pandemic world may generate tune out and churn.

**DEG: How will the merger between Xperi and TiVo help meet these challenges?**

**BN:** Making entertainment more entertaining is at the core of Xperi’s value proposition. The TiVo customer promise is to make it easy for consumers to find, watch and enjoy the content they love. Xperi now offers DTS, IMAX Enhanced, and TiVo branded solutions that make entertainment more entertaining. TiVo has a proven, industry leading content discovery platform for music, movies and media while DTS has made core investments in audio, imaging and machine learning solutions that enhance the end user experience. We are excited to have the opportunity to work with our partners across the industry to enhance the entertainment experience and make content search and discovery a seamless, enjoyable process.

**DEG: What will the biggest opportunity for the combined company be five years from now?**

**BN:** As consumer content consumption continues to grow across connected media platforms, we see our primary opportunity as an open content discovery and experience platform embedded on the consumer electronics brands you love in your home, in your car and on portable devices on the go.

IN THIS JOB: 7 Years
PRIOR EXPERIENCE: 30+ years in entertainment including 15+ at DTS
HOMETOWN: Northridge, Calif.
LIVES NOW: Chatsworth, Calif.
ENJOYS, OUTSIDE OF WORK: Fly fishing, hiking, boating, old cars, woodworking, MLB, BBQ
CONTACT: bill.neighbors@xperi.com
In a time of economic uncertainty, it is interesting to see the strong demand and growth for premium subscription services as well as premium EST offerings. Clearly, consumers are seeking high quality entertainment experiences at home.

DEG: Consumer viewing of all types of digital media spiked during the long stay-at-home period of the coronavirus pandemic. Have you noticed any change in consumer expectations for quality of visuals and sound brought about by this experience?

BN: In a time of economic uncertainty, it is interesting to see the strong demand and growth for premium subscription services as well as premium EST offerings. Clearly, consumers are seeking high quality entertainment experiences at home, there is a market for premium home entertainment and when making those purchases consumers seem to migrate to the brands they know and love. As an example, early promotions for IMAX Enhanced movies have over indexed 2:1 versus non-branded offerings of the same titles.

DEG: What's the last content you binged in quarantine, and how did you watch it?

BN: I have been watching IMAX Enhanced versions of movies on FandangoNOW (Terminator: Dark Fate and Spider-Man: Far From Home), Yellowstone, and of course, Hamilton a few times on Disney+.

As befits an outdoorsman, Neighbors is watching Yellowstone.

“In a time of economic uncertainty, it is interesting to see the strong demand and growth for premium subscription services as well as premium EST offerings. Clearly, consumers are seeking high quality entertainment experiences at home.”
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