



Media Minutes

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Producers: Stevie Converse and Candace Clement

TRANSCRIPT

Comcast Hungry. Eats NBC.

Comcast, the largest cable and residential broadband provider in the country, announced Thursday morning that they are going to purchase a controlling stake in NBC Universal, one of the largest media companies in the world.

If approved by federal regulators, this merger would create a media behemoth that reaches hundreds of millions of homes and stretches across content production and distribution, movie and television studios and broadcast television stations..

The merger, which will be the first deal of its scope and size under the Obama administration, is strongly opposed by public interest and consumer groups like Consumer Federation of America, Media Access Project and Free Press; unions like the Communication Workers of America; and smaller cable companies represented by the American Cable Association.

Josh Stearns is program manager of Free Press. He says that this merger would put incredible power into the hands of one company. But this won't just impact diversity on the airwaves. The deal will also hit our wallets.

Josh Stearns: It's going to raise prices, it's going to limit competition and its going to open the door for a whole new wave of mega-media mergers.

In an era where online video is on the rise, the merger could spell disaster for consumer choice in online video platforms like Hulu, Netflix, iTunes and others.

Josh Stearns: We're likely to see Comcast clamp down on NBC and Comcast content, which is really going to inhibit the growth of these online video projects. We could imagine a time when Comcast began limiting people's access to NBC content or Comcast content online unless they were a Comcast subscriber. So picture this: If you want to watch 30 Rock, you'd better be a Comcast subscriber. That's how it could be if you want to get 30 Rock online.

Free Press is rallying public opposition to the deal. Stearns explains that stopping media consolidation was a key part of President Obama's media and technology campaign platform. His administration's response to the merger will be an important test.

Josh Stearns: *We need a public outcry like we've never heard before to stop this deal in its tracks.*

To find out more about the Comcast-NBC merger, visit www.freepress.net/comcast.

Swapping Episodes for Webisodes

Entertainment companies have slashed budgets to the bone, leaving fewer new scripted programs in the nightly lineup and a lot of writers and actors out of work. Many are migrating to the Internet. The Web is giving them a chance for success that they would never have realized in the legacy network system.

Actress Ruth Livier knew her ingénue days were coming to an end. She began acting at 15. But after 15 years in the business, she took script writing classes with the hope of writing a pilot for TV. She realized that the bilingual show about a small-time Mexican-American talk show host named Ylse, spelled Y-L-S-E, would never make it onto a network. She retooled it for the Web, got a small crew together and began production.

Ruth Livier: *I didn't want it sitting on my bookshelf. I've heard so many scripts just end up sitting on shelves. And this was an opportunity to go out there and produce it and distribute it on a world wide basis. So I got subtitles in English and subtitles in Spanish, since the original version is bilingual. And that way I think it even broadens our potential audience base.*

The first year, Ylse could be found on its own Web site, Ylse.net, and on YouTube. Now in its second season, the show is hosted on a number of sites, including BlipTV and CineDulce. Livier says content creators are finding each other through these new Web channels.

Ruth Livier: *That's also one of the exciting things on the Web – that people from across the country, people who are creating channels have found Ylse and have asked me if they could host the show. For us, it is a win-win because their audience, to be a part of their lineup with the audience they already have built in. And for them, it's the same; they bring Ylse audiences to their site.*

Livier is hopeful that these new online video channels will soon be attracting advertisers. But right now, the name of the game is inexpensive production and distribution, which is all Web based. And for that, she needs an open, neutral and fast Internet. Being completely independent, she says there would have been no way that she could afford to do it otherwise.

Ruth Livier: *Because the Net is free, then I can distribute it world-wide, and I get to compete for eyeballs and for hits on the basis of the quality of the content. People are coming on board because they like the show. But I needed to get the show out there for people to be excited about it and want to be a part of it and support it.*

For Livier, access is the key – for content providers and for viewers.

Ruth Livier: *Right now, the way the Internet is, we have Net Neutrality. And if they change it, then the user's not going to have control of the Internet. It's going to be the powers that be are going to decide what we can or can't watch, should or shouldn't watch. And I think that's fundamentally wrong.*