

# Fantasy Sports Network Will Be Reality In March 2014, Canadian Media Vet Says

Leaving no possible sports-TV opportunity untested, the owner of **The Fight Network** and **My Combat Channel** is making plans for a new channel to serve participants of fantasy sports leagues.

**Leonard Asper**, CEO of Toronto-based **Anthem Media**, received a license in Canada to start a fantasy-sports broadcast network, and he told *The Wire* he'll be starting **FNTSY Sports Networks** in both Canada and the United States next March.

He's pursuing carriage deals with U.S. multichannel distributors and Anthem has already acquired a pair of Web sites, **RotoExperts.com** and **SportsGrid.com**, to tie in with the channel and provide content.

Video-on-demand and streamed video programs are key components of the FNTSY plans, Asper said. "We don't need a big carriage deal to launch," he said.

A low carriage bar is a good thing to have, given how hard it is for networks to get added to cable, satellite and telco lineups.

"Linear-channel distribution is really, really difficult, between bandwidth crunch and cost," Bob Watson, a former **Time Warner Cable** programming negotiator who's now a consultant and president of **Watson Media Group**, told *The Wire*. Fantasy-sports content could help distributors with sports tiers, he said, but the concept might ultimately work best as an IPTV or online service.

Asper — the former CEO of Canadian media conglomerate **Canwest**, which sold its broadcast assets to **Shaw Media** in 2010 — said he thinks "fantasy is the biggest opportunity of all."

Some 35 million adults in North America participate in fantasy leagues, in which teams are formed via drafts of players and compete based on those players' accumulated statistics. Football is by far the biggest fantasy sport (72%), according to surveys the network cited.

Fantasy-league participants are relatively affluent and spend a lot. Nielsen released a report last week that said fantasy football app users spent 2 hours 14 minutes per person, on average, on the smartphone



FNTSY Sports Networks will become a reality in the U.S. and Canada next March.

apps in September, and fantasy players are 49% more likely than the average adult U.S. Internet user to have shopped online for beer.



Anthem Media's Leonard Asper

Asper envisions studio and on-location shows related to major sporting events. Chris Doleman, a former National Football League defensive lineman, is on board for on-air and development roles.

Asper said the network will be a combination of **CNBC** and **CNN** for fantasy sports, with some reporting, "a lot of predictions" and on-air personalities.

Anthem Media also is a part owner of **The Pursuit Channel**, an outdoor-sports outlet, along with **The Fight Network**, which broadcasts in Canada and recently launched in Belgium on **Liberty Global**-owned **Telenet**, and **My Combat Channel**, carried on **Grande Communications** in Texas.

At Canwest, Asper was involved with channel launch-

es in Chile, Ireland (TV3) and New Zealand. Canwest also was part owner of Canadian versions of **Scripps Networks'** **HGTV** and **Food Network**, and Asper sees Food's passionate audience bases on TV and online as forming a template for the fantasy-sports channel.

Anthem currently programs 30 hours per week on the fantasy sports channel on **Sirius XM Satellite Radio**.

Along with the many sports networks already serving up fantasy-league fare, potential competition could come from another fantasy-sports network with launch plans.

**Fantasy Sports Zone TV**, backed by former **Paxson Communications** top executives **Steve Friedman** and **Jeff Sagansky**, also would target 35 million fantasy-sports players, with 3,000 hours of original programming in sports ranging from baseball, football, basketball and NASCAR to hockey and golf, they said in a news release on Nov. 5.

*The Wire* attempted to reach the other channel's backers for more information about those plans, but they declined comment.

— Kent Gibbons

## © Semi-Unofficial Peek At Comcast's X2 Had Official Comcast Feel

**Comcast** still hasn't revealed a launch date for X2, the upgraded, multiscreen-capable follow-on to its X1 platform, but the operator has been giving observant customers an early taste of a user interface that promises to provide more personalized features.

Offering a hint that Comcast is closing in on an official debut of X2, the operator recently leaked a sequence of letters and numbers that existing X1 subscribers can input into their remote controls to pull up an early build of the new set-top interface and take it for a test drive.

Perhaps calling it a "leak" isn't quite the right de-



A screen shot of the "leaked" X2.

scription. In fact, a degree of encouragement was involved, as none other than **Sree Kotay**, Comcast Cable's senior vice president and chief software architect, tweeted this quasi-cryptic message to his followers on Nov. 20: "Have Comcast Xfinity X1? Try hitting exit-exit-exit-X-T-W-O (#shhhh...)." Several users took Kotay up on the offer and posted their findings on the **DSL Reports** message boards; the reviews of the latest test rendition of X2 were relatively positive.

"Much smoother than before! Some new features too," wrote "JeepMatt," a Comcast subscriber who evidently resides in Wilmington, Del.

It's not the first time Comcast has given X1 subs a preview of X2, inadvertent or not. Back in October, customers got access to an earlier build of the new UI by pressing a different special code on their remotes, a move that seemingly shows off the agility of Comcast's new cloud-based approach.

And if you give much credit to what's posted on message boards, X2's initial rollout could be just days away. Posting on the "Official X2 Beta Thread" on the Comcast boards, user "andrew.lindsay" proclaimed that the "X2 interface will be rolled out on new installs between Dec. 4-10" and that some Comcast customers will be invited to use the new UI via e-mail.

Comcast didn't respond for comment on that one by *The Wire's* deadline. But we'll keep our eyes fixed on the Twitter feed for any more X2-related "leaks."

— Jeff Baumgartner