

VARIETY

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PRICE IS RIGHT?

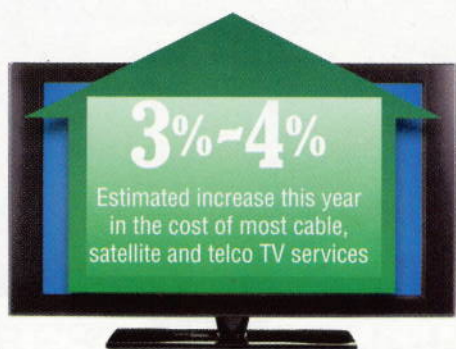
Cable, satellite and telco operators bet that consumers won't cut the cord as they hike monthly bills in response to higher programming costs.

By ANDREW WALLENSTEIN

The pressures of a changing marketplace haven't kept MSOs from raising subscription prices on multichannel video offerings across the country.

Some of the top cable, satellite and telco services have hiked the cost of TV service in recent months even as criticism persists regarding the high cost of subscription TV packages, particularly as the U.S. economy continues to struggle and cheaper digital alternatives emerge.

If anything, it's a sign of con-



fidence from MSOs heading into a series of fourth-quarter earnings calls starting Thursday with Time Warner Cable.

But for MSOs, posting any increase at all means running the risk that they'll finally hit a price

ceiling with consumers, triggering the very cord-cutting trend most industry observers say has yet to occur on a meaningful scale.

"Any time a rate increase happens, it comes with the potential for subscribers to make a decision," said Bruce Leichtman, who tracks the multichannel world for Leichtman Research Group.

"It's a bit of a gamble, but I wouldn't say it's a bad one."

It's impossible to pin down an average figure for rate increases because the complexities of packaging and discounting obscure those

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Michael Palin, John Cleese, Terry Jones and Terry Gilliam will reunite while Eric Idle is in talks to join.

The almost full Monty

By DAVE McNARY

Members of Monty Python's Flying Circus are reteaming for "Absolutely Anything," a sci-fi farce combining CGI and live action, with Terry Jones to direct and Mike Medavoy to produce.

Plans are for filming to begin in the U.K. this spring, with the Pythons voicing key roles as a group of aliens who endow an earthling with the power to do "absolutely anything" to see what a mess he'll make of things — which is precisely what happens.

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'Robot' revs 'Dance' deals

By JEFF SNEIDER and JOSH L. DICKEY
PARK CITY, Utah

Dealmaking was lively at the Sundance Film Fest Wednesday as Sony Pictures Worldwide Acquisitions and Samuel Goldwyn Films partnered to acquire comedy "Robot & Frank" while IFC Films was in final negotiations for "Liberal Arts."

Meanwhile, on Tuesday Millennium Entertainment took U.S. rights to Rodrigo Cortes' paranormal thriller "Red Lights" for just under \$4 million.

"Robot," produced by Park Pictures

See **SUNDANCE** page 18

Netflix on the rebound

By ANDREW WALLENSTEIN

If reporting a rebound in the number of streaming subscribers was going to allow Netflix to earn back some respect, the number of obstacles still ahead is enough to give pause to even the company's most ardent supporters.

Shares for the Los Gatos, Calif.-based firm surged in after-hours trading after its fourth-quarter earnings beat estimates. Shrugging off the doldrums that descended late last year, Netflix managed to add 220,000 domestic streaming subscribers in the quarter, ending the year with 21.67 million subs.

But founder Reed Hastings acknowledged a host of fresh challenges to come on a conference call with analysts Wednesday, from the pending loss of top-shelf Disney films that were part of its deal with

Starz that expired last year to his expectation that Amazon plans to challenge Netflix with a cheaper standalone subscription service.

In a letter to investors accompanying the company's fourth-quarter numbers, Hastings warned that Netflix's only "significant" loss in February was 15 Disney titles, including "Toy Story 3" and "Tangled." Also

See **NETFLIX** page 17



Netflix is bullish on the prospects for its new U.K. service

MPTF ADDING PATIENTS

By DAVE McNARY

Three years after announcing plans to close its long-term care unit, the Motion Picture and Television Fund facility will begin admitting new patients.

The MPTF said Wednesday that it will immediately begin adding patients to the long-term care unit in Woodland Hills. First priority will be given to former MPTF long-term care residents who were relocated in the wake of the proposed closure of the unit in 2009.

There are currently 29 patients at the facility, and that number will go up to 40 — far less than the 136 housed in long-term care in early 2009, when the MPTF said a cost crunch would force it to shutter the long-term care unit and the acute-care hospital.

The decision to admit new patients is a marked change for the

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CINEDIGM WADES INTO 'WATER'

By JEFF SNEIDER

Cinedigm Entertainment Group has acquired North American distribution rights to Pablo Croce's directorial debut "Like Water," a documentary that explores the life of UFC champion Anderson Silva.

Deal was negotiated by Christine D'Souza and Kevin Iwashina of Preferred Content on behalf of producer Jared Freedman of Flow

With the Go Films.

Leveraging its position as a digital exhibitor of indie film and alternative content, Cinedigm will release "Like Water" theatrically in early summer. Lionsgate will handle domestic ancillary distribution. Cinemavault is handling all international rights outside North America.

Doc focuses on Silva's life leading up to his UFC 117 win over Chael Sonnen. Silva is the longest-

reigning UFC Middleweight Champion and one of the greatest mixed martial arts fighters of all time.

Pic premiered at the 2011 Tribeca Film Festival, where it won the new documentary director nod.

"It was clear that Cinedigm's platform and distribution strategy was the best way to showcase the film for audiences," said Kevin Iwashina, managing partner of Preferred Content.

SUNDANCE

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Features, is from first-time director Jake Schreier and has garnered strongly positive reviews out of the fest. Acquisition price was north of \$2 million.

It stars Frank Langella and Susan Sarandon alongside James Marsden, Liv Tyler, Jeremy Sisto, Jeremy Strong and Peter Sarsgaard, who voices the robot.

In other deals

■ Lionsgate and Roadside Attractions partnered for U.S. rights "Arbitrage" for just over \$2 million.

■ The Weinstein Co. is in talks to acquire "Lay the Favorite," though the deal has not yet closed.

Producers include Galt Niederhoffer, Sam Bisbee, Jackie Kelman Bisbee and Lance Acord.

SPWA and Samuel Goldwyn Films will partner on the U.S. theatrical release and jointly acquired North American rights.

Additionally, SPWA has acquired all rights for Latin America, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Scandinavia and Eastern Europe including Russia.

Deal was negotiated by SPWA's exec VP of biz affairs Michael Helfand and Joe Matukewicz, senior VP of acquisitions, with Peter Goldwyn, VP of acquisi-

tions, representing Samuel Goldwyn Films. CAA and ICM negotiated on behalf of the filmmakers. ICM represents Langella, Sarandon and Strong. Park Pictures Features is represented by John Sloss and Marc Simon.

"Jake's film shows us a future that is right around the corner, and I, for one, can't wait for my own robot," Matukewicz said.

"Our team fell in love with this clever, irreverent story anchored by Frank Langella's indelible performance," said Samuel Goldwyn Films prexy Meyer Gottlieb.

"Arts" project

"Liberal Arts" stars Josh Radnor, Elizabeth Olsen and Richard Jenkins, and was directed by Radnor, whose "Happythankyoumoreplease" played Sundance in 2010. The helmer plays a thirtysomething college adviser who returns to his alma mater.

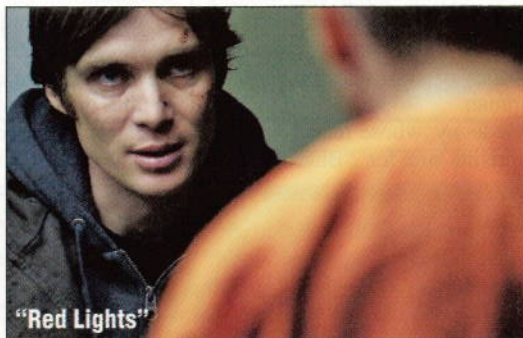
Supernatural "Lights"

"We came to Sundance with the intention of buying 'Red Lights' if it was good," Millennium Entertainment topper Bill Lee told *Variety* minutes after closing the deal. He said Millennium plans a standard theatrical platform release, with ancillaries coming 90-100 days later.

UTA negotiated the deal on behalf of the filmmakers. Cortes produced "Red Lights" with Adrian Guerra, while Cindy Cowan, Irving Cowan and Lisa Wilson exec produced. Sigourney Weaver and Cillian Murphy star as a team of paranormal skeptics who set out to debunk a famous telekinetic, played by Robert De Niro.



"Robot & Frank"



"Red Lights"

ACAD

Continued from page 1

"If the decision were made to move the ceremony up, this would definitely facilitate that," said AMPAS chief operating officer Ric Robertson. "We would still be able to keep the eligibility period tied to the calendar year."

Several other industry groups have been using electronic voting for years, including the Screen Actors Guild and the Directors Guild of America, both of which direct voting members to a password-protected part of their website in order to cast ballots. The time savings is dramatic, considering final voting ballots are due to the DGA and SAG Friday, and the orgs' awards ceremonies are

Saturday and Sunday, respectively.

Robertson emphasized that "security remains as high a priority as it has been" for the org. Because of those concerns, he said it's too early to discuss what method of electronic voting members can expect, but it will most likely be used for the nomination and final voting phases of the awards.

However, Robertson would not go into details about what kind of transition the Academy would employ for moving toward an all-digital process.

"We're committed to making sure that every one of our voters

who wants to vote can, and there will be an alternate method for those who want it," Robertson added.

Robertson said the Academy consulted organizations within the industry and outside of it during its 18-month search for a firm.

The contracted company AMPAS hired, Everyone Counts, will work with ballot-counters PricewaterhouseCoopers, whose role in tabulating Academy members' votes will remain unchanged. Over the next year, the Academy will undertake a rigorous security and user-acceptance testing process.

Multiple layers of security that include military-grade encryption techniques are built into the products of Everybody Counts, which also sells to U.S. Dept. of Defense.



Robertson

TV R



Spartacus: Vengeance

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say having shed their slave owner, Spartacus (as played by McIntyre, physically fine but not overly charismatic) and his band of escaped gladiators are on the prowl for Roman blood, with the occasional respite for some sweaty screwing.

Mostly they function like a band of pirates, with Spartacus as the level-headed presence, trying to rein in the driven Crixus (Manu Bennett) and his lusty Gauls.

Recognizing the show isn't defined by its line readings, the producers have upped the ante (if possible) on sheer titillation. Assaults on the Romans in the episodes previewed include a melee at an orgy, which is sort of a Reese's Peanut Butter Cup for the show — combining two mainstays, sex and violence, in one. Aping the visuals of "300," the battle sequences also revel in slow-motion attacks and streaming splatters that literally engulf the camera lens.

Among the drawbacks are the

Film

The Woman in Black

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very subtly to the atmosphere of unease, or whether they are just figments of the imagination. The more obviously visible specters, meanwhile, including the titular Woman in Black (Liz White), owe a particular debt to recent Asian pics, especially Hideo Nakata's "Ringu," in the unsettling, fast-gliding way they move and appear.

It's a pity, then, that lead Radcliffe doesn't bring more charisma to the party, although the "Harry Potter" franchise has made him skilled enough now in the art of looking frightened. The problem is when he's not called on to tremble and look bug-eyed, Radcliffe still seems too puppyish to convince as a parent himself.

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