

CORD CUTTING

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a comprehensive guide to
CORD CUTTING

It's an age-old question: why pay more than you have to? And as technology advances at such a rapid pace, there are cheaper and easier ways to access goods and services than ever before.

Unless you're a member of the older generation, chances are you don't subscribe to a print newspaper. But obviously that's not to say that you don't read the news. Quite the contrary, you've likely discovered, as millions of consumers have, that millions of news sources exist online for a fraction of the cost if not completely free.

You can even continue to support your favorite local or premium publications, paying a few bucks a month for digital access, rather than paying the overhead to have a grubby stack of paper delivered to your home every day. It makes so much more sense for everyone involved.

The good news is that if you've mastered getting your news online, you can apply the same principles to save potentially thousands of dollars a year on a similar legacy subscription: cable and satellite pay-TV.

The facts are the same. You pay through the nose to have hundreds of channels piped into your home via proprietary equipment, when much of that same content exists online for a fraction of the price, often free.

Without paying a dime, there are hundreds of thousands of free and ad-supported TV shows and movies; so many that you'd never run out of content to watch.

Streaming services like Netflix and Hulu make even more content available for a fraction of the monthly cost of cable TV, while virtually any individual movie or TV episode can be rented for a few bucks.

Likewise, live sports and other events, as well as 24/7 news and weather coverage are also available from both free

and paid sources in a similar manner.

The bottom line is that the content is out there. A 2013 study found that 94% of the top movies and 85% of top television shows were legally available online, and both numbers have only grown rapidly since then as more consumers turn to the web for their entertainment.

The trouble, however, is managing it all. While a trip to the New York Times' website offers everything the print edition of the paper does, TV providers have opted to make it more difficult for consumers to access their content online.

In this, they have succeeded in at least forestalling a mass exodus from cable TV. Those who still pay a triple-digit TV bill every month are often paying for the convenience, accepting the inflated pricing for the luxury of not having to hunt down content on their own.

"While a trip to the New York Times' website offers everything the print edition of the paper does, TV providers have opted to make it more difficult for consumers to access their content online."

This creates the opportunity that is the focus of this e-book. By knowing a few tricks for finding content and getting it at the cheapest price, canceling your cable or satellite TV and saving hundreds of dollars each month while still accessing all of your favorite content can be as easy, and as much of a no-brainer, as cancelling that old newspaper or landline telephone.

With a few tips and tricks, and perhaps a few devices costing less than a single month's cable bill, any consumer in America with an internet connection can create for themselves a television experience that is competitive with pay-TV service at a lower cost.

A key to this savings is the ability to tailor your media spending to your own tastes. Cable and satellite TV are a one-size fits all proposition. Even the smallest packages feature hundreds of channels. So many that your average consumer never watches more than a handful of them.

With a guide to the various streaming services and content sources out there, an explanation of various media hardware that can help, and tools to manage it all and make it simple, what follows will open an entire world of affordable entertainment for media consumers of all ages and levels of expertise.

FREE OTT CONTENT



Where to find the freshest OTT (over-the-top) content and insight into how broadcasters decide to publish content.

SOURCE: [TomsGuide.com](https://www.tomsguide.com)

Introduction

While an abundance of free apps are available for streaming OTT content, consumers often forget to start from the source. The same major broadcasting companies we see on cable television—ABC, CBS, NBC, FOX, PBS, Telemundo, etc.—have apps to stream live and aired content. The key here is, much like cable television, you must endure a certain amount of advertising. This in turn gives broadcasters the revenue they need to sustain and provide free streaming capabilities.

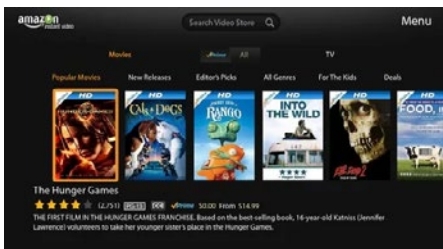
You may have to wait for last night's prime time special to become available for streaming, but the savings can be worth it. Check your app store and see for yourself. Most major broadcasters have hopped on the bandwagon already, and lesser-known providers are beginning to join the game as well. With such a crowded market, SmartGuide had to develop a way to bring the wide web of apps, websites, and networks together.

10 Best Free Streaming Services

With services like Netflix, Hulu and Amazon Video, there's a lot of stuff to watch online — but it'll cost you a pretty penny. If you want to watch the latest and greatest TV and movies, you'll have to shell out some money.

But if you're just looking for a way to pass a lazy afternoon, you can find a nearly endless stream of content that won't cost you a dime. From Crackle, to Tubi, to Yahoo, the internet is positively teeming with free (and legal!) TV and movies for your viewing pleasure. Take a look; you have nothing to lose but a few hours.

Amazon Video (includes paid content)



Amazon Video is a paid service for the most part, but you can get a taste of its award-winning shows without ever opening your wallet. Amazon is perfectly willing to give away the first episode of shows like *Mozart in the Jungle*, *The Man in the High Castle*, *Tumble Leaf*, *Transparent*, *Sneaky Pete* and *Red Oaks*. Granted, one episode of a long-running show will probably only whet your appetite for more (almost as if

Amazon isn't giving away content out of the kindness of its heart), but you could watch a solid few hours of free prestige TV before you decide whether to take the plunge.

Available on: Amazon Fire TV, Android, Apple TV, computers, iOS, Nvidia Shield, Roku, smart TVs, PlayStation 4, Xbox One

Crackle

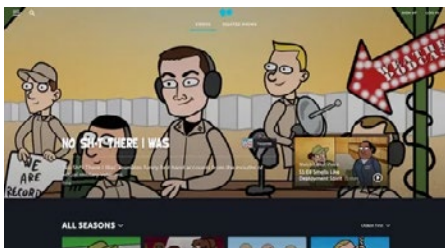
The great-granddaddy of free streaming services, Crackle is still one of the best. Sony owns the site, meaning that you'll be able to find some of your favorite TV shows and movies, from Seinfeld and Heroes, to The Karate Kid and The Thing. The shows and movies are all available on a rotating basis, so you won't always be able to find exactly what you're looking for, but you'll also never want for new content.

You'll also have to watch ads, but it's no worse than sitting through the average network or cable program. There are even a few original shows, like SuperMansion.



Available on: Amazon Fire TV, Android, Apple TV, computers, Google Chromecast, iOS, Nvidia Shield, Roku, PlayStation 4, smart TVs, Xbox One

go90



No one is exactly sure what Verizon plans to do with go90, but the service is free to enjoy while the company makes up its mind. Yes, Verizon has its very own ad-supported streaming service (we were just as surprised as you were), and it's not bad at all, especially if you like nostalgia-inducing TV shows. From Veronica Mars, to Babylon 5, to Fringe, you can find a lot of weeknight cult classics. The

movie selection is so-so, but there's some decent anime and a handful of web shows. Verizon customers can also stream go90 content on their phones, and it won't count against their data limits.

Available on: Android, computers, Google Chromecast, iOS

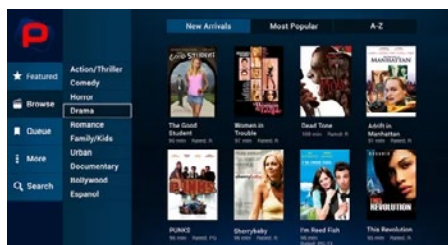
Kanopy

Battle-hardened cheapskates know that the public library is often the best place to stock up on free movies and TV shows, but they also know that the library closes early and has often already lent out the best stuff to other patrons. Enter Kanopy, a streaming service that works in conjunction with your local library to offer you up to six free streaming movies every month. While it's mostly documentary and art-house fare, you can still find fan favorites like Donnie Darko, Memento and A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night. Not every library offers it, but if yours does, all you need is a library card.



Available on: Android, computers, iOS, Roku

Popcornflix



Although it probably draws its name from the legally shady Popcorn Time BitTorrent streamer, Popcornflix is actually quite innocuous. You just download the app or visit the site, then watch popular-ish movies for free, as long as you're willing to sit through some advertisements during them. The movies come and go on a regular basis, but you can find titles like *The Warriors*, *Stagecoach*, *Secretary* and *The*

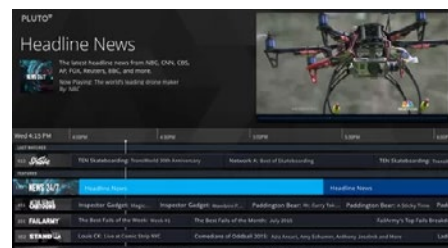
Hunt for Red October. There are some throwaway web shows as well, but you can safely ignore them in favor of the campy classic films on offer.

Available on: Amazon Fire TV, Android, Apple TV, computers, Google Chromecast, iOS, Roku, Xbox One

Pluto TV

Streaming individual movies and shows for free is relatively easy; it's much harder to find a way to stream live content.

Pluto TV offers more than 75 live channels, and the remarkable thing is that you're probably even familiar with some of them. Pluto TV is particularly useful for news junkies, as you can stream NBC News, CBSN, Bloomberg TV, as well as stations for weather and sports. There's a little something for everyone, whether you want classic TV shows, kids' programming or nonstop B movies. Of course, you'll have to watch on Pluto TV's schedule rather than your own, but that shouldn't be a problem for veteran TV watchers.



Available on: Amazon Fire TV, Android, Android TV, Apple TV, computers, Google Chromecast, iOS, Roku, Smart TV

The Roku Channel



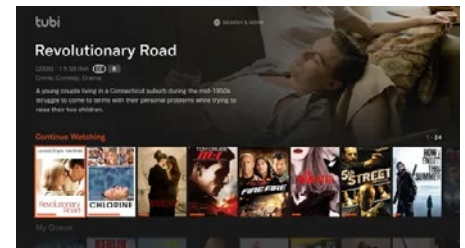
It's probably not worth running out and buying a Roku device just to get The Roku Channel. However, if you already have one of the company's streaming gadgets, this service is a nice little perk. The Roku Channel offers a rotating selection of streaming movies, although, like with many competing services, you'll have to sit through some ads in

order to watch the content. The selection is pretty good, at least. Over the last few months, Roku has offered titles like *Legally Blonde*; *Philadelphia*; *Girl, Interrupted*; and *The Pianist*. You can also find some TV shows, like Gene Roddenberry's *Andromeda* and *The Dead Zone*, although there's not much of a selection.

Available on: Roku

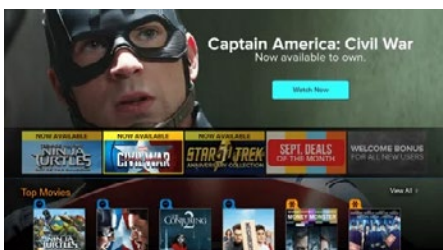
Tubi

Tubi follows a familiar pattern: In exchange for watching some advertisements, you'll be able to access a whole rotating library of movies and TV shows on a variety of platforms. The big difference between Tubi and some of its competitors is that this service has some legitimately good content. Movies like *True Grit* (2010), *School of Rock*, *Death at a Funeral*, *The Kite Runner* and *Dial M for Murder* are a cut above the usual free streaming titles. TV-wise, you can sink your teeth into *The IT Crowd*, *Merlin*, *Black Books* and some other British favorites — just be warned that the U.S. TV on offer is, generally, much weaker.



Available on: Amazon Fire TV, Android, Android TV, Apple TV, computers, Google Chromecast, iOS, PlayStation 4, Roku, Smart TV, Xbox One

Vudu (includes paid content)



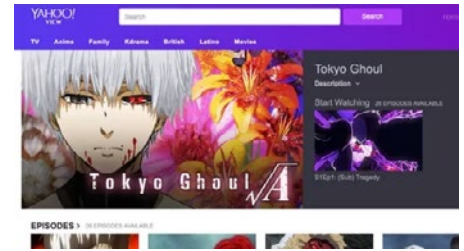
Walmart owns the popular video-streaming service Vudu, which means that, if nothing else, Vudu has become ubiquitous. Recently, though, Vudu has turned into more than just a repository for the digital copies of Blu-ray movies you've already bought. The company now offers a rotating selection of high-profile films, including *Battle Royale*, *Young Adult*, *Pi* and *Daybreakers*. There are some free TV shows as

well, but they're not really worth diving into, unless you like semi-obscurer kids' shows or incomplete anime series from the '80s. Vudu's selection may be haphazard, but the platform is available on almost every streaming device, making it a good starting point for free streaming content.

Available on: Amazon Fire TV, Android, Android TV, Apple TV, computers, Google Chromecast, iOS, PlayStation 4, Roku, Smart TV, Xbox One

Yahoo View

While Hulu is strictly pay-to-play these days, it used to have both free and paid tiers. The free tier didn't go away; it simply became Yahoo View, a surprisingly good way to watch recent episodes of hit TV shows, such as *The Gifted*, *Family Guy*, *Inhumans*, and *Law & Order*. Like Hulu, Yahoo View offers an eclectic selection of new episodes from prime-time TV shows, as well as complete runs of older programs, including sitcoms, sci-fi adventures and long-running anime sagas. There are movies as well, but they're all direct-to-video schlock that your local public-access station would be embarrassed to run on a Friday night.

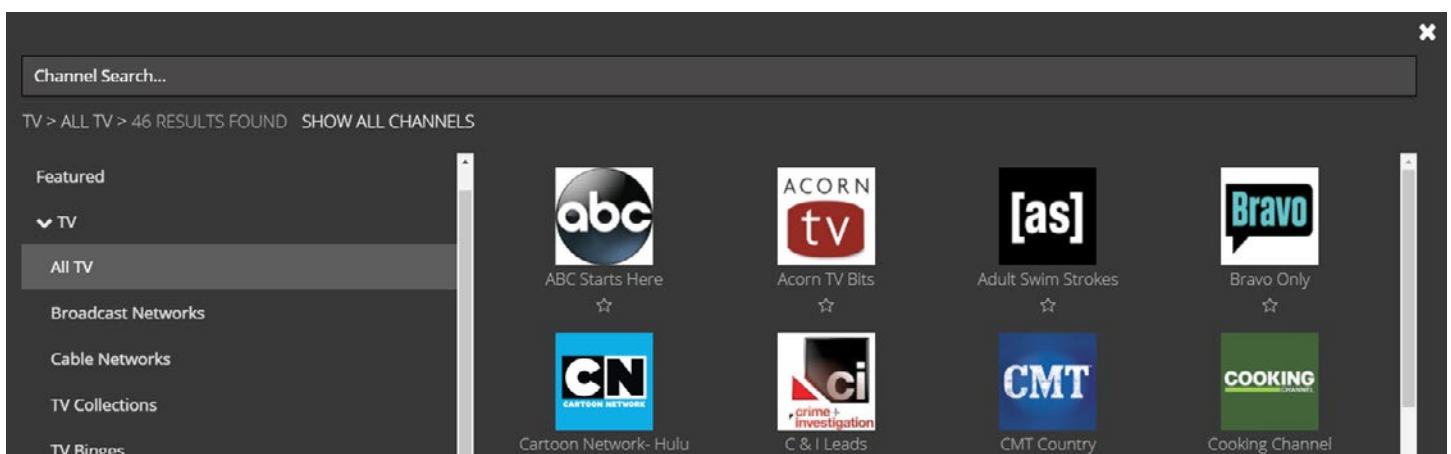


Available on: Computers

CONCLUSION

- » Most OTT content is available one day to one week after it airs.
- » Just like TV or cable, streams are generally paired with advertising—except cable providers charge you on top.
- » SmartGuide recognized the need to focus on aggregating & organizing all content into one place. Much like your cable guide, minus hefty fees.
- » We don't charge for hardware or the content—just our SmartGuide. No box rentals or carrier fees, plus utilities such as favorites and personalized carousels make for a richer experience.

Pictured: SmartGuide's "Channel Search"





OTA AND ANTENNA

OTA (over-the-air) / antenna setups, and how to get free signals with the proper configuration for your area.

SOURCE: [DigitalTrends.com](https://www.digitaltrends.com)

How to install a TV antenna for free HDTV

A TV antenna used to mean spindly pairs of telescoping metal rods (“rabbit ears”), and getting them to work required clever positioning, maybe a little aluminum foil, and sometimes a few interpretive dance moves. Fun! Today we can receive video over the internet to our televisions, phones, and tablets thanks to streaming services like SlingTV, PlayStation Vue, YouTube, and more. And modern technology has likewise whisked antennas into the 21st century; the most popular types today look more like a sheet of paper than a robot rabbit’s noggin, and some even come with tiny USB-powered amplifiers built right in.

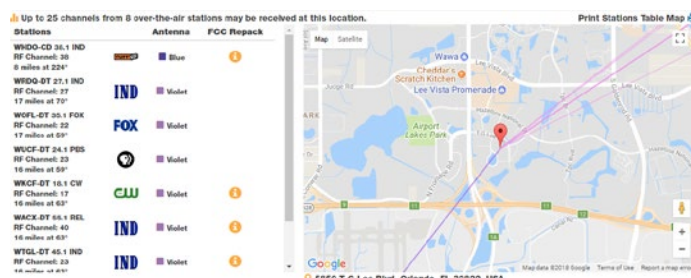
You’d think, then, that choosing an antenna and installing it is a process that would also benefit from modernization. Yeah, that’s we thought, too.

But when we got to evaluating various brands and styles, we learned that picking the right antenna and finding the best place to put it is still one part science, two parts voodoo. The key to success is to manage your expectations and prepare yourself for a little trial and error. In the end, a little effort goes a long way, and we think it’s totally worth it. Here are some tips on how to install a TV antenna in your home, as well as hunt down the perfect one for where you live.

Get the lay of the land

You can get a general sense of where you’ll want to put your antenna by visiting Antennaweb.org. Plug in your ZIP code and street address and the site will show the locations of local broadcast antennas relative to your home. It also attempts to suggest what type of antenna you might need (medium multi-directional, small directional, amplified, etc.).

We’ve had mixed results with the antenna-type suggestion tool. For instance, at our address, a medium-sized directional antenna would appear to be the right choice. Yet we can pull in nearly every station available with a small, multi-directional antenna. If you live in or around a major metropolitan area, you may also find this to be the case.



Once you know where the broadcast antennas are, consider the geographical landscape between those towers and you. If there are any large, high-elevation objects within your line of sight, or if you live in a deep valley, you may find that you’ll need to place your antenna in the attic, on the roof, or even up in a tree to get solid reception. Conversely, if you live in an elevated area, you may find you can pull in a great signal, even from far away.

If you live in a downtown area where there are a lot of high-rise buildings, all bets are off. This is because most of the signals you pull in will be reflected off of other buildings, and there's no telling where they come from. This doesn't mean you can't get reception, it just means that you may not be able to get all channels from any single antenna location.

Picking an antenna

If you've done any research at all, you know that there are a lot of antennas to choose from. We've had the best results using models from Mohu, Winegard, Terk, HD Frequency, and Antop. In our testing, antennas from HD Frequency consistently came out on top. But we prefer the style and durability of Mohu's antennas — you'll pay a little more, but we think it's worth it in the end. For those who live within 20 miles of broadcast towers, we suggest the Mohu Leaf Metro, the AmazonBasics Ultra Thin, and the HD Frequency Cable Cutter

Mini. For those a little further out, the Mohu Leaf 30 and Mohu Curve 30 are excellent, as is the full-size HD Frequency Cable Cutter. For more options, check out our full list of the best HDTV antennas you can buy for a more detailed breakdown of our favorites.

Amplified antennas, such as the RCA Flat Digital Amplified or Terk Horizon, are only a good idea if you live 50 miles or more from broadcast towers. The amplifiers built into these antennas can take a weak signal and making it stronger, so your TV's tuner will recognize it and lock in better. Amps are also good for distributing a single signal out to several televisions. Amplifiers will not improve reception, however, so if you are just barely getting a signal, an amplifier won't make it stabler. In fact, using an amplifier when it is not necessary can actually degrade the signal you send your television, much as a digital zoom feature can degrade the quality of a photograph.

Where do I put this thing?

This is the part where you need to embrace the practice of trial and error. There are so many factors that play into broadcast signal reception that the best place for your antenna might be the last place you'd think to put it. With that said, we do have some general guidelines to offer:

- **Near the side of the residence closest to the broadcast towers** — Generally, you should be better off trying to capture a direct signal rather than one reflected off your neighbor's house.
- **In a window** — The portion without the



AmazonBasics Ultra Thin



Mohu Leaf Metro



HD Frequency
Cable Cutter



Terk Horizon

metal screen tends to work best.

- **High on a wall** — Conventional wisdom suggests higher is better.
- **Behind the TV** — If you've got no problems pulling in reception, a tiny antenna like the Mohu Metro or HD Frequency Mini can be hidden right behind a TV. We've gotten better results placing the antenna toward the top of the TV rather than the bottom, where the TV's electronics tend to live.
- **Outside** — Antennas like the HD Frequency models actually look better outdoors than they do in, if you ask us. These indoor-outdoor hybrids can be tacked onto your home's siding (see placement tip #1) and can often be tied into a home's existing coax cable block, allowing for the signal to be split to several rooms. If you do so, you may want to use an amplified splitter to maintain signal integrity.

Once you've picked a general location, or if you just want to experiment with several locations, connect your antenna to your TV and have it scan for channels. Based on your search at Antennaweb.org, you should know how many channels are in your area. When your TV is done scanning, it should not only tell you how many channels it has found but which ones are locked in. If you see any missing channels, try a different location and re-scan. Rinse and repeat until you've found the best possible location.

Special note: If you live out in the boonies, you'll need to elevate your antenna, which means buying a mast, mast mount, and a long length of coax cable — and doing some climbing. How high the antenna must be mounted will depend on your

situation. See anyone else around with an antenna set up? You probably need to go as high. We have had good luck with the Mohu Sky 60 in these scenarios, but you should also consider this 80-mile antenna from Antop, a kit that comes with almost everything you need to service three TVs (by tying into an existing cable distribution system).

Customize your channel list

Chances are, you are going to wind up scanning and programming channels you have absolutely zero interest in receiving. Most TVs allow you to add or delete channels from your list manually. Make channel flipping a little easier by ditching the ones you don't want. If you're a Plex user, you can also connect your antenna to your Plex server with a TV tuner, creating a sort of make-shift TV service complete with DVR.














That's it! We hope this little guide has been helpful. Enjoy the fruits of your labor. We think you'll find the picture quality you get with broadcast HD is far better than what you get from your cable or satellite company. In fact, since it is uncompressed, it will likely be the best picture you get outside of UHD Blu-ray discs. Some manufacturers are even future-proofing their antennas with 4K support, so those who have a 4K UHD TV will even get to take full advantage of these.

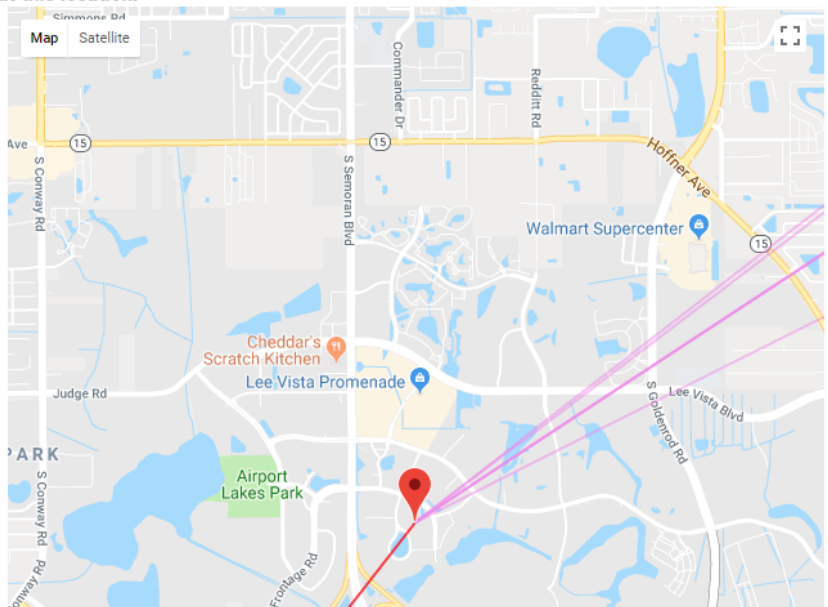


CONCLUSION

- » Because local news, sports and events are managed through local contracts, an OTA antenna is the only free means of watching the broadcast as it airs.
- » Sports packages can run for hundreds alone, and usually contain more than you want to (or can) watch. Watch your local team and news for free with an HDTV antenna.
- » SmartGuide provides customers with a free HDTV antenna (plus postage) to unify OTA and OTT content under one roof.

Up to 25 channels from 8 over-the-air stations may be received at this location.

Stations	Antenna	FCC Repack
WATV-LD 47.1 IND RF Channel: 47 8 miles at 224°	IND 	
WHDO-CD 38.1 IND RF Channel: 38 8 miles at 224°	IND 	
WRDQ-DT 27.1 IND RF Channel: 27 17 miles at 70°	IND 	
WOFL-DT 35.1 FOX RF Channel: 22 17 miles at 59°	FOX 	
WUCF-DT 24.1 PBS RF Channel: 23 16 miles at 59°	 	
WKCF-DT 18.1 CW RF Channel: 17 16 miles at 63°	CW 	
WACX-DT 65.1 REL RF Channel: 40 16 miles at 63°	IND 	
WTGL-DT 45.1 IND RF Channel: 23 16 miles at 63°	IND 	



Pictured: AntennaWeb.org's Reception Map

STREAMING SERVICES



In this section we explore the most popular streaming services along with weighted pros and cons of each.

SOURCE: [PCMag.com](https://www.pcmag.com)



STREAMING SERVICE COMPARISON

(Source: PCMag.com)

SINGLE CHANNELS



SKINNY BUNDLES



LIBRARIES



Streaming services can be divided into three major, distinct buckets: single channels (HBO, Showtime, etc.), channel bundles (a.k.a. skinny bundles—Sling TV, PlayStation Vue) and libraries (Netflix, Hulu, Amazon Instant Video). Single channel apps are limited content-wise by the provider of the app. For example, HBO Go will only have material produced and licensed by HBO. This is great if you love everything HBO has to offer, but what if you wanted to expand your options? SmartGuide needed to make sense of the developing bundle and channel market for our subscribers and give them the ability to synthesize their own entertainment ecosystem.

Skinny bundles are an increasingly popular content distribution system that falls somewhere between traditional cable television and pure à la carte option-wise. Content is offered in a tiered structure, with pricing plans based on the amount of selection. Say, for example, you love conventional programming but don't watch sports, or vice versa. Packages are tailored to suit these different needs accordingly. While skinny bundles aren't the perfect solution for everyone, as personal tastes often overlap, it's a step closer to paying for only what you want and getting what you pay for in value.

The library system seems to have taken over a large portion of the market, likely due to the sheer amount of freedom of access the consumer has, along with an affordable price tag. The virtue of unlimited access to a wide variety of licensed and original content has caught on since Netflix pioneered the model, one which has evolved astronomically since its 2007 launch. In the end, content delivery method with OTT boils down to what best suits your tastes and entertainment needs. Most libraries offer the ability to browse their content before hitting a pay wall, and often free trials are offered to give the customer a chance to explore the territory before making the leap with their credit card.

The Best Video Streaming Services of 2018

Streaming services started as an add-on to DVD and digital download offerings with a trickle of second-run movies and TV shows. But speedier internet connections, an abundance of dedicated streaming video devices, and an explosion of mobile video has allowed services like Netflix and Amazon to bulk up their streaming libraries, invest millions in original content, and give traditional pay TV providers a run for their money.

There's a wide world of streaming services beyond Netflix and Hulu. Which one(s) deserve your subscription dollars? We break it all down.



STREAMING SERVICE COMPARISON

(Source: PCMag.com)

Product	DirecTV Now	Sling TV	Hulu	CBS All Access	fuboTV	Amazon Video	Netflix	HBO Now (for iPad)	Sony PlayStation Vue	YouTube TV
Lowest Price	\$35.00 DirecTV	\$20.00 Sling Media	\$7.99 Hulu	\$5.99 CBS Interactive	\$39.99 fuboTV	\$8.99 Amazon	\$7.99 MSRP EDITORS' CHOICE	Free iTunes Store	\$29.99 MSRP	\$34.99 MSRP
Editors' Rating	●●●●○	●●●●○	●●●●○	●●●●○	●●●●○	●●●●○	●●●●○	●●●●○	●●●●○	●●●●○
Best For	Cord Cutters With AT&T	Cord Cutters	TV Fans	CBS Fans	Sports Fans	Bargain Hunters	Original Programming Fans	Premium Content Fans	Cord Cutters With PlayStation	Google Faithful
Starting Price	\$35/month	\$20/month	\$7.99/month	\$5.99/month	\$39.99/month	\$8.99/month	\$7.99/month	\$14.99/month	\$39.99/month	\$35/month
Concurrent Streams	2	1-4	1	2	2	2	1-4	Yes (undefined)	1-5	3
Live TV	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	—	—	—	✓	✓
Original Programming	—	—	✓	✓	—	✓	✓	✓	—	—
Ads	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	—	—	—	✓	✓

(image credit: PCMag.com)

Netflix (from \$7.99 per month)

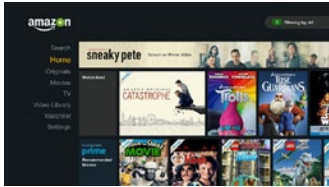


Netflix is the standard-bearer of streaming. There's a solid selection at all times, with new titles exchanged for older ones monthly. And there's Netflix original programming to take into account, too. It's the only place to get your fix of shows like *Orange Is the New Black*, *Stranger Things*, and *Jessica Jones*.

The \$7.99-per-month plan is for one standard-definition stream. For two concurrent HD streams (two people watching from the same account at the same time), it's now \$10.99. For \$13.99, you can get up to four concurrent streams and support for 4K content. Netflix is available on a variety of devices, from your PC and tablet to the Chromecast and game consoles. And you can now download content for offline viewing. The company's DVD service still exists if you want newer releases, but Netflix has long said that streaming is its primary focus going forward.

(Available on Android, iOS, and web)

Amazon Video (from \$8.99 per month)



Standalone Amazon Video will set you back \$8.99 per month, but if you plan to stick with it for more than a year, you might as well swing for Amazon Prime, which includes Amazon Video—not to mention Amazon Photos, Amazon Music, and a number of other Amazon-centric perks—for \$99 per year.

Amazon has about 40,000 titles to stream, but only a fraction of those are included with Prime streaming. Look for the “Prime” banner atop selections that stream for free. Everything else is available to purchase or rent (for Prime and non-Prime members).

Amazon also enables offline downloads, so if you haven’t finished watching *Transparent* or want to catch up on some older HBO shows for your next flight, download to your tablet and get watching.

In 2015, Amazon also launched the Streaming Partners Program, which lets you add networks like Showtime and Starz to your Prime account, sometimes for a slight discount (save \$2 per month on Showtime via Amazon vs. buying on its own, for example).

Amazon Video does not work with Google’s Chromecast, but it’s available on Roku, as well as Amazon’s own Fire TV devices, smart TVs, and more. At WWDC, Apple announced it will soon arrive on Apple TV, too. Prime Video supports two concurrent streams, as long as you’re watching different videos.

(Available on Android, iOS, and web)

DirectTV Now (from \$35 per month)



The DirectTV Now streaming service offers dozens of channels of live TV without installing a satellite dish or running cables. The service features excellent picture quality and plenty of connectivity options, and subscriptions start at \$35 per month. You won’t find DVR or rewind features, but you can get premium channels like HBO for just \$5 extra per month. There four plan tiers: Live a Little, Just Right, Go Big, and Gotta Have It.

- Live a Little offers more than 60 channels for \$35 per month, covering the big networks you’d get in a standard cable package.
- Just Right is \$50 per month and includes 80+ channels, adding more niche and spin-off networks.





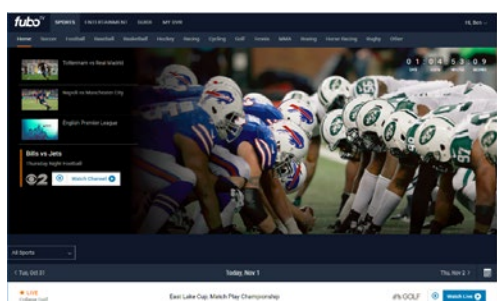
STREAMING SERVICE COMPARISON

(Source: PCMag.com)

- Go Big costs \$60 per month, but is available at a promotional price of \$35 during DirecTV Now's opening months, and brings the total number of channels past 100 by adding networks like BBC World News, Discovery Family, Logo, Oxygen, Sprout, and Sundance TV.
- The \$70 monthly Gotta Have It package gives you more than 120 channels, adding Boomerang, Chiller, El Rey, Univision Deportes, and eight Starz channels.

You can add HBO or Cinemax to any package for \$5 each, which includes all live HBO or Cinemax channels and access to the respective networks' on-demand library. Local affiliates include ABC, Fox, and NBC, and their availability depends on your location. CBS and The CW, meanwhile, aren't available on the service.

fuboTV (from \$39.99 per month)



fuboTV is a great option for any cord-cutting sports fans. This "sports-first, but not sports-only" service offers extensive live sports and entertainment content for all your devices. Whether you want to watch NFL games on Sunday, catch up an MLB game that aired during the day, or even stream a movie on-demand, fuboTV has you covered.

Its flagship subscription plan, fubo Premier, does cost \$39.99 per month, but it grants you access to 82 television channels to enjoy. For the national sports events, there's NBC, CBS, FOX, NFL Network and NBA.TV. For international sports, you get channels from the beIN network and Univision. And if you're ever not in the mood for sports, fuboTV offers a wide variety of other channels such as The Food Network, CNBC, FX, USA, SYFY, and National Geographic, just to name a few. You not only get to watch live events and programs from these channels, but also a ton of on-demand shows and movies.

fuboTV also offers some cheaper plans aimed at international markets, including fubo Latino for \$14.99 per month and fubo Portugues for \$19.99 per month. You can also supplement any of these base plans with add-on content, including an \$8.99 per month Sports Plus option.

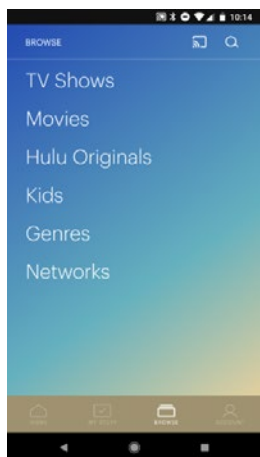
To top it all off, fuboTV offers excellent DVR capabilities and Lookback, a feature that lets you watch anything you may have missed up to 72 hours after it first aired. Enjoy solid streaming performance via its web interface or dedicated apps for Android, iOS, Apple TV, Roku, and Fire OS devices.



STREAMING SERVICE COMPARISON

(Source: PCMag.com)

Hulu (from \$7.99 per month)



Hulu has done away with its free, ad-supported tier. For full seasons of current and classic TV series, as well as original content, you'll have to subscribe for \$7.99 per month.

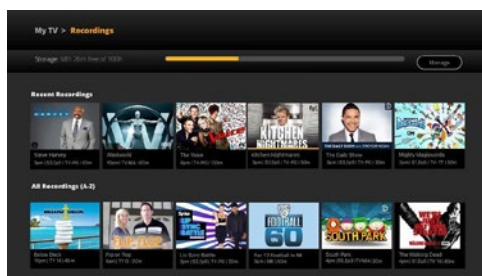
Unlike Netflix and Amazon, which typically get new TV series months or even a year after their TV debuts, Hulu gets content almost immediately after airing on TV thanks to its big studio backers. One of the drawbacks, however, is that Hulu still includes ads. An ad-free tier costs \$11.99 per month, though some popular shows will have 15-second pre-roll and 30-second post-roll ads.

If you're on the fence, you can get Showtime for \$8.99 per month with a Hulu bundle and save \$2 per month. You can also add HBO or Showtime to your Hulu account for \$14.99 and \$9.99 per month, respectively, but that won't save you any money; it's just convenient to not have to switch apps.

Hulu supports a variety of gadgets, but you can only stream to one device at a time. You can't yet download content for offline viewing, though that is reportedly in the works. Make sure to check out Hulu's latest redesign across all of its platforms; it features elegant navigation menus and a glossy overall aesthetic.

Hulu recently released a live TV option, named simply Hulu With Live TV. It starts at \$39.99 per month and is currently in beta, but already its value and the sheer amount of content available earns it our Editors' Choice for live streaming TV services. Watch on two screens simultaneously or upgrade to unlimited streams for another \$14.99.

Sling TV (from \$20 per month)



Sling TV is probably as close to the traditional TV experience as you can get online. For \$20 per month, Sling TV offers live access to channels like AMC, TBS, The Food Network, CNN, TNT, and more.

As you add more services, though, Sling TV can add up. There's the basic Sling Orange plan with support for one stream at \$20 per month, Sling Blue with support for three simultaneous streams for \$25, or both with support for four simultaneous streams at \$40.

Why would you want both? Some channels on Sling Orange are not available on Sling Blue and



STREAMING SERVICE COMPARISON

(Source: PCMag.com)

vice versa (here's a breakdown). The Disney Channel, for example, is only on Sling Orange, while Fox Sports is only on Blue.

Sling also offers extra add-ons for \$5 per month each. A Comedy extra adds MTV, Spike, Logo, and more, while a Kids extra offers channels like Teen Nick and Disney Junior—none of which are available via Sling Orange or Blue.

Another \$5 extra is cloud DVR, which supports up to 50 hours of content. You can record multiple programs simultaneously and watch on Amazon, Android, Apple TV, Roku, and Xbox One devices. Cloud DVR is not currently supported for Disney and ESPN or on-demand channels like Newsy and Local Now.

PlayStation Vue (from \$39.99 per month)



If you're a PlayStation fan who's cutting the cord, Sony's PlayStation Vue live-streaming service is a good way to ditch your cable company while keeping plenty of channels. Plans start at \$39.99 per month for live TV with 45+ channels, including Disney and ESPN. Add sports, movie, and premium packages and prices will range from \$45/month up to \$75/month.

Sony PlayStation Vue on iOS/PS4 started in only a few markets, but went national last year. Channel availability varies by market, though, so check your location before signing up. "In some cases where a live local broadcast channel isn't available, an alternative On-Demand channel will be available in its place," Sony says.

You can DVR PS Vue content, except HBO, Showtime, and Cinemax, though "almost all programs" from the live feed of those channels are available on demand. DVR and on-demand content can be watched inside or outside the home, except CBS shows, which are only accessible inside the home.

The service supports up to five streams at once, but there are exceptions, like only one PS4 or PS3 can stream at a given time (you can't stream from a PS4 in the living room and the bedroom at the same time) and only three streams at once on mobile devices. You can watch on a variety of devices, like your web browser, Apple TV, Android TV, Amazon Fire TV, Roku, Chromecast, and iOS or Android devices—provided you have internet access.

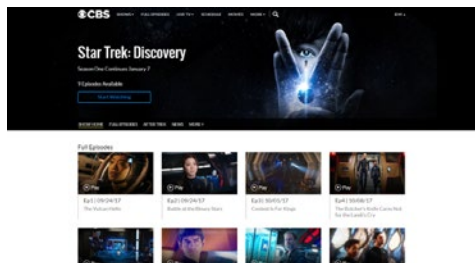




STREAMING SERVICE COMPARISON

(Source: PCMag.com)

CBS All Access (from \$5.99 per month)



While it might seem rather limiting to pay for on-demand access to just one broadcast TV channel, CBS does have a popular lineup of TV shows, and CBS All Access is the only place you can watch The Good Wife spin-off The Good Fight and Star Trek: Discovery. You can also watch NFL games that are broadcast in your local market, including Thursday Night Football on CBS (though you can't watch on a mobile phone because of a deal Verizon has with the NFL).

For \$5.99 per month, you can tap into 8,500 episodes; stay up to date with shows currently on the air or catch up with old favorites like The Twilight Zone, Taxi, and every Star Trek you could hope for. New episodes are available the next day, and it supports live TV streams in 185 markets.

HBO Now (from \$14.99 per month)



The first major premium channel to go out on its own was HBO. The network's content has been available online for awhile via HBO GO, but that requires a pay TV login to watch. For several years, HBO didn't want to rock the boat with its cable partners, but it eventually acquiesced to fans' demands and released an online-only version, dubbed HBO Now, for \$14.99 per month.

Sign up and get a free trial via apps from Amazon, Google Play, and the App Store, or add the HBO Now channel to your Roku player. Those with internet service from Frontier, Google Fiber, Liberty, Optimum, Service Electric, and Verizon can also add HBO Now to their web package. Once you're signed up, you can watch on your PC and other devices. New episodes appear several minutes to an hour after they begin on live TV, and everything on HBO GO is also on HBO Now.



(Available on Android, iOS, and web)



YouTube TV (from \$35 per month)



YouTube TV also provides live TV streaming, but check to make sure it's available in your city.

With YouTube TV, you get unlimited cloud DVR storage. YouTube will keep your recordings for nine months, and you can stream your content from anywhere in the US, if you're connected to the internet (and you sign in from a home network once every three months to verify your location). One YouTube TV membership supports up to six accounts, so you can share with family or roommates, though you can only stream from three accounts at once.

CONCLUSION

- » In addition to loads of free content, premium content in à la carte or skinny bundles are available.
- » Most of the cable networks are available for free with advertising. They can also be purchased for watching cable shows when they air using skinny bundles or single channel subscriptions.
- » Aggregate, search and use our Subscription Manager to create a complete library of personalized entertainment for you.



PAY-PER-VIEW (PPV)

Sometimes
free just
won't cut it.
Meet Pay-
Per-View and
PPV's most
widely used
providers.

SOURCE: Lifewire.com

An Introduction to Pay-Per-View (PPV)

With so many variables involved (starting with the service itself), PPV options have become increasingly fragmented. Would you like to see your movie in SD or HD? How does 4K tickle your fancy? Would you like to rent or buy? Too many options can borderline overbearing. We've included an article that dissects the options on a more granular level. Because we found SmartGuide subscribers needed a comparison engine to ensure they receive the best price, we've tacked on a little-known tool that streamlines the convoluted process in this section's conclusion.

Where Should You Buy Your Digital Movies?

In 2000, it was hard to imagine the music CD becoming obsolete, and even crazier, being replaced by... nothing. In 2001, Apple released their first iPod. Vinyl has outlasted the CD, perhaps in the same way that the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) became a best-selling console over 30 years after its original release. Even digital music is seeing its replacement looming as subscription services pop up left and right. And soon, the digital world will eat our movie collection. But where should we buy our digital movies and TV shows?

In 2001, Apple released the iPod and unleashed digital music on the world. So when they launched the iTunes music Store two years later, it was an easy decision to go with Apple. But with digital video, Apple, Amazon, Google are all competing to be our provider. Even Microsoft is belatedly getting into the mix. They all have their perks, but one unsettling fact remains true with all of these providers: you can't simply download your movie and use it on any device you want. You are locked into using that particular company's app, which may not be available on every device.

Which company is the cheapest? With retail prices set by the studios, they are all about the same in terms of price. However, you can still find some movies on sale, so it's possible to shop the deals. Unfortunately, this splits your library, which means you'll need to use multiple apps and even multiple devices to view your collection.

So which provider should you choose for your digital movie library? The answer to that question may be decided by what devices you use as much as which company you like the most, so we'll go over the pros and cons of each provider.



Vudu

We'll start with the one that you may not have heard about before reading this. Vudu popped up in 2007, so they've been around for a while. But who are they? One primary thing you need from your digital movie provider is trust. You don't want to buy some movies and have the company shut down in two years, and with Amazon, Google and Apple, you don't have those worries.

You also don't have those worries with Vudu. In 2010, they were acquired by Wal-Mart. And while Vudu isn't a household brand, Wal-Mart certainly is. Vudu offers movies in SD, HD and their own HDX format, which is a slightly superior rendition of HD. Some movies are also available in Ultra HD (UHD).

One nice benefit of Vudu is the ability to download the movie to your PC. Most video providers are now offering offline downloads for mobile, but Vudu and Apple offer the same service for desktop and laptop PCs. You still must use their respective apps, but it's a nice benefit.

Vudu supports UltraViolet, which is a digital locker that gives you access to digital copies of DVD and Blu-Ray titles. This is a great way to build your online collection while still buying DVDs and Blu-Ray discs. Vudu also offers some movies for free with advertisements.

Compatibility? Vudu has perhaps the widest range of support for devices. You can get it on your Roku, iPhone, iPad, Android smartphone or tablet, Chromecast, XBOX, PlayStation and a number of Smart TVs.

Vudu Pros:

- You can download movies and TV shows to both PCs and mobile devices for offline viewing.
- Vudu is platform neutral, so it is available on most devices.
- Supports both UltraViolet and Disney Everywhere.
- Has their own 'HDX' format that improves (slightly) on HD quality.
- Large selection of 4K/UHD titles.
- The 'free with ads' collection of movies is a nice bonus.

Vudu Cons:

- The interface isn't quite as smooth as the competition.
- Not as well known as Amazon, Apple and Google.



Google Play

While this list isn't to be interpreted as best-to-worst, Google Play gets the second mention based mainly on the ability to stream their offerings on a wider range of devices than Amazon Instant Video or Apple's iTunes movies and television.

It's easy to trust Vudu's neutrality in the war over our digital video lockbox because they don't have a device they are trying to push. Google's Android, Chrome and Chromecast platforms doesn't exactly make them Switzerland, but they've played nice in the war for our living rooms. Google's philosophy is more about providing the opportunity to watch on the largest range of devices rather than battling it out for platform dominance.

Google Play offers some titles in UHD, but these title aren't marked in the store, so it can be difficult to know if any particular movie is available in UHD until you go to buy it. Google Play does offer a \$0.99 rental to new customers, so it is worth checking out if just to save a couple of bucks on a movie night with the ability to watch your collection on both Android and Apple mobile devices through the Google Play Movies and TV app.

You can stream Google Play on your iPhone, iPad, Android, PC, Roku, many smart televisions or through Chromecast. Google Play isn't available for Apple TV (yet?), but if you have an Apple TV, you can use AirPlay to stream your Google Play collection.

Google Play Pros:

- Available on a wider range of devices than Apple and Amazon.
- Good selection of 4K/UHD video.
- You can download video to your mobile device.
- Offers an introductory \$0.99 rental.
- Supports Disney Everywhere.

Google Play Cons:

- Doesn't work with your game console, so XBOX and PlayStation owners will have to stream from another device.
- No offline downloads for the PC.



iTunes

If you own an iPhone, iPad and Apple TV, it may seem like a simple decision to do your shopping in iTunes. As you can imagine, Apple's ecosystem works great together. The TV app on Apple TV and iPad brings your collection together with various subscription services like Hulu and HBO Now, which makes browsing for what to watch much easier. You can also download movies to your desktop or laptop and well as your iPhone or iPad, so you can enjoy your collection off line.

What you can't do is watch anything on Android. Or Roku. Or your Smart TV. Or that Blu-Ray player with all the streaming apps. Or basically anywhere besides a PC or an Apple device.

That's enough to give even Apple Watch owners some doubts on whether or not to put all those eggs in Apple's basket.

Fans of UHD/4K will also be disappointed to know that Apple is late to that party. 4K streaming really hasn't caught on as much as Blu-Ray -- buying digital 4K movies is twice as expensive as HD and the titles are still very limited—but if you want to build

a top quality movie collection, having the option is a definite must.

Apple isn't a bad choice for those who love their products. But remember, the iPhone is only ten years old. In ten more years, we could all be using smart devices from a company that doesn't even exist yet. And will we be able to take our movie collection with us?

Despite the lack of 4K offerings, Apple is top-notch in just about every other category. They offer a great streaming service, you can download your movies to any device that can actually play them, they always have some type of deal going on, and what's better, those deals are easy to find thanks to a pretty decent interface.

Apple iTunes Pros:

- One of the first to offer streaming video, movies, TV shows and rentals and still a leader in terms of stability and performance.
- Works great with the iPad's and Apple TV's new TV app, which will let you browse and select movies and TV from various sources alongside of your own digital collection including Hulu, HBO Now, Starz, etc.
- Allows offline downloads to both PC and mobile devices.
- Supports Disney Everywhere.

Apple iTunes Cons:

- Compatibility limited to Apple's ecosystem (iPhone, iPad, iPod Touch, Apple TV) and Mac and Windows-based machines.

- No 4K/UHD support.



Amazon Instant Video

Amazon's Prime service, which includes a Netflix-style streaming service alongside the free two-day shipping, helps make Amazon Instant Video a prime target for the holder of our digital library. They also offer a selection of 4K video and allow downloads to mobile devices for offline viewing.

So why aren't they a no-brainer?

Amazon's biggest enemy is Apple. It would be easy to recommend Amazon's Instant Video as one of the best digital provider's except for one crazy little thing: they refuse to sell the Apple TV. In fact, they kicked Apple TV out of the store. They also don't sell Google's Chromecast, although they happily sell other devices that use the same 'cast' technology.

Here's where it gets even crazier. Amazon kicked these products out of their store because they don't work with Amazon's Prime and Instant Video services even though the only reason those devices can't show Amazon's video is because Amazon hasn't put out an app (in the case of Apple TV) or modified their app (in the case of Chromecast) to work with those devices.

Oddly enough, you can still watch Amazon's Instant Video and Prime streaming subscription on Apple TV if you use AirPlay.

Should this worry you enough to use another service? Perhaps. Amazon is willing to deny access to their video services in order to better compete with Apple and Google. Is Roku next?

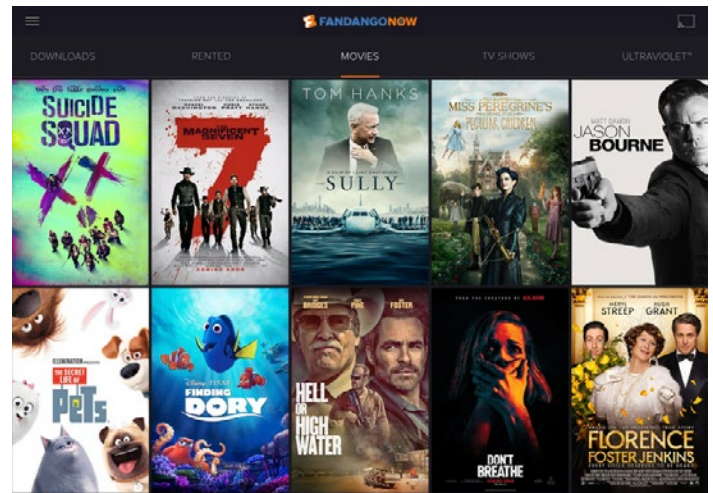
While Amazon doesn't exactly play nice with others, Amazon Prime and Amazon Instant video are available on a wide range of devices, including the iPhone and iPad. Amazon also supports Android smartphones and tablets, Roku, XBOX, PlayStation, PC, most Smart TVs and (of course) Amazon's Fire devices, which run on top of Android. And while they don't have an Apple TV app, you can stream to Apple TV via AirPlay.

Amazon Instant Video Pros:

- The tie-in with Amazon Prime video makes it easy to browse through available movies and TV from both Prime and your digital lockbox.
- Plenty of 4K titles.
- You can download to your mobile device for offline viewing.
- Supports Disney Everywhere.

Amazon Instant Video Cons:

- No downloads for the PC.
- Amazon is known for not playing nice with others.



More Options and What Companies to Avoid

We've covered the four best overall choices for your digital movie and TV collection, but there are plenty of companies competing for this spot that didn't make the top of the list.

FandangoNow: Previously known as M-Go, Fandango Now is the closest on the list of also-rans to make it to the big list. They have the same variety of movies and TV shows you would expect from iTunes and Amazon, you can watch them on devices ranging from your Roku to your Android device to your iPhone/iPad to your PC and even your XBOX ONE, and they offer a credit system to help you earn free stuff. The acquisition and transition from M-Go to FandangoNow is rather recent, so time will tell how well they stack up against the big boys, but they are a leading contender to go toe-to-toe with Vudu if not Amazon or Apple.

Microsoft: The tech leader that dominates the desktop and laptop market has been rather late to the game when it comes to

streaming. But their tardiness isn't the reason they don't make the list. The lack of availability on iOS, Android, Roku and other non-Microsoft platforms is a good enough reason to skip buying from them.

Sony: Surprisingly, Sony holds one of the best cut-the-cord solutions out there in PlayStation Vue. And if we were looking for cable-over-internet, they would definitely be on the list. But while they sell digital movies and TV, they have the same platform-dependence issues as Microsoft

Where NOT to Buy Your Movies and TV Shows

It's all well and good to list out the various options for your digital video lockbox, but what about those companies you should avoid at all costs?

Obviously, if you've never heard of the company, you shouldn't trust them with your movie collection. We've all heard of Apple and Google and Amazon, which makes us more comfortable doing business with them.

But what about your cable company? It might seem easy to purchase movies directly from your cable provider, but it really becomes just one more thing that locks you into the service. While some companies offer ways to view your purchases after you end the service, it's much better to go with a company that offers more permanence.

Disney Movies Anywhere is Just That: Take Your Disney Films (almost) Anywhere

Don't like your digital library tied to one single company? Neither does Disney. The big difference is that Disney can actually do something about it. And the big surprise is that they actually did.

Disney Movies Anywhere allows you to buy a Disney movie from iTunes, Amazon Instant Video, Google Play, Vudu, Microsoft or FIOS and transfer rights to any and all of them. This includes Star Wars, Marvel, Pixar, etc.

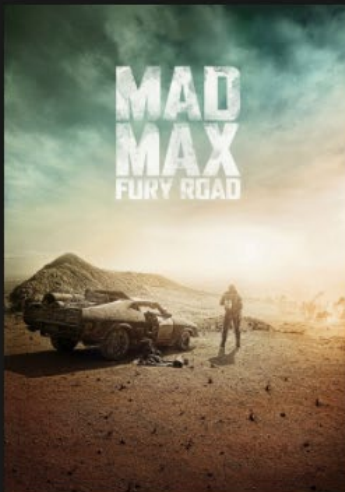
This also makes Disney films a great way to check out the different services.

It's just a shame that the other movie companies haven't followed in Disney's footsteps.

CONCLUSION

- » With so many PPV options there is a need to understand pricing, quality and rental terms.
- » SmartGuide recognized the need to streamline the PPV pool and created a PPV Deal Finder.
- » The PPV Deal Finder interface presents all available purchasing options in one location—much like the entertainment equivalent of Kayak and Trivago.

Where to Watch



Mad Max: Fury Road

From director George Miller, originator of the post-apocalyptic genre and mastermind behind the legendary "Mad Max" franchise, comes "Mad Max: Fury Road," a return to the world of the Road Warrior, Max Rockatansky. Haunted by his turbulent past, Mad ...

[Read More](#)

Premium

iTunes	Amazon	VUDU	Google Play	FandangoN...
Rent \$3.99 Buy \$14.99	Rent \$2.99 Buy \$9.99	Rent \$3.99 Buy \$14.99	Rent \$2.99 Buy \$9.99	Rent \$2.99 Buy \$9.99
YouTube	Verizon On ...			
Rent \$2.99 Buy \$9.99				

Pictured: SmartGuide's PPV Deal Finder

STREAMING DEVICES



Popular streaming devices listed alongside prices and features—at a glance.

SOURCE: CNET.com



FROM

\$63.77

ROKU STREAMING STICK PLUS

Best streamer overall

Lightning-fast responses, oodles of apps and a dead-simple interface help propel Roku's streamers to the top of our lists. This 4K HDR streamer is so good and affordable you might want one even if you don't (yet) own a 4K HDR TV.

CNET'S RATING

9**10****9****9**

Design

Ecosystem

Features

Performance



FROM

\$179.00

APPLE TV 4K

Best high-end 4K HDR streamer

With more features and capabilities than you'll ever use, as well as Amazon video (finally!), Dolby Vision capability and overall superb performance and design, the Apple TV 4K is the best streamer on the market for those who want to afford it.

CNET'S RATING

10**10****10****9**

Design

Ecosystem

Features

Performance



FROM

\$47.75

ROKU STREAMING STICK 2017

The best streamer if you don't want 4K or HDR

For buyers who don't care about 4K or HDR streaming, the Roku Streaming Stick is the best player on the market.

CNET'S RATING

8**10****8****8**

Design

Ecosystem

Features

Performance



FROM **\$69.99**

AMAZON FIRE TV (2017)

Best streamer for Alexa fans

The Fire TV is very good for everyone, but the best reason to choose it over Roku is if you have an Alexa speaker and want to use its superior voice control in your system.

CNET'S RATING

8

8

9

9

Design

Ecosystem

Features

Performance



FROM **\$27.99**

ROKU EXPRESS (2017)

Best basic streamer

You expect a streamer this cheap to suck somehow, but the Express does not. It's plenty-fast, packed with apps and unlike Chromecast, actually includes a remote control. All you need to stream, nothing you don't.

CNET'S RATING

6

9

5

7

Design

Ecosystem

Features

Performance



FROM **\$39.99**

AMAZON FIRE TV STICK W/ ALEXA VOICE REMOTE

Best budget streamer with voice

Want to talk to your TV, and have your TV talk back? If you have a 4K TV, choose the higher-rated Fire TV above. But if you're on a tight budget and don't care about 4K, the basic stick is a great choice.

CNET'S RATING

7

7

8

9

Design

Ecosystem

Features

Performance



STREAMING DEVICE COMPARISON

(Source: CNET.com)



FROM **\$199.96**

NVIDIA SHIELD (2017)

Best streamer for geeks, gamers

Sure it's relatively expensive, but the do-it-all Shield belongs in the same conversation with other top-tier streamers. And if you can use its myriad other gaming, file-sharing and similarly geeky functions, it could be worth the extra money.

CNET'S RATING

8 **9** **10** **10**

Design Ecosystem Features Performance



FROM **\$43.89**

ROKU EXPRESS PLUS (2017)

Best streamer for old TVs

If your TV lacks HDMI inputs, you don't have very many choices in streaming devices. The Express+ is the best, delivering Roku's superb app ecosystem, ease of use and even free cables.

CNET'S RATING

6 **9** **6** **7**

Design Ecosystem Features Performance



FROM **\$35.00**

GOOGLE CHROMECAST (2015)

Best value for phone-centric users

If you can watch it on your phone or tablet or computer, the dirt-cheap Chromecast can probably put it on your TV. The downside? There's no separate remote, so you'll need your phone or tablet or computer to use it. Or your Google Home speaker.

CNET'S RATING

8 **7** **6** **8**

Design Ecosystem Features Performance

CONCLUSION

- » Not all TVs are created equal—how smart is your TV? Even high-shelf sets can come with an unwelcome amount of proprietary limitations.
- » With so many ways to get content on your TV, almost all TVs offer casting or mirroring of some form.
- » SmartGuide saw the need for a streaming method to cultivate a universally accessible experience free of constraint. SmartGuide unlocks your TVs inherent limitations.



FROM **\$63.77**



FROM **\$179.00**



FROM **\$47.75**



FROM **\$69.99**



FROM **\$27.99**



FROM **\$39.99**



FROM **\$199.96**



FROM **\$43.89**



FROM **\$35.00**



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