

# How to get FREE HDTV and Cut the Cable

#### Contents

Introduction
Cable Alternatives2
Picking an Online Video Service6
What Hardware  Do You Need?12
Conclusion 10



### INTRODUCTION

#### Why cut the cord?

Sometimes it seems like your mailbox is nothing but a printing machine for an endless series of bills. Just when you think you've seen them all, another one pops out like a little gremlin and steals a bit more money from your bank account. You want to stop them, but everything you're buying seems so essential. Well, there's one "essential" that I guarantee you can do without.

Unless I miss my guess, one of the biggest bills you get each month is the cable bill. You easily spend more than \$100 a month to watch your favorite shows, sports and movies. That's money you're taking away from essentials like food, clothes, medical bills or fuel.

It's even worse when you see studies showing that even with 180+ channels available, most people only watch 17. That's 150+ channels and thousands of shows you really shouldn't need to pay for, but good luck getting cable companies to let you to pick and choose channels, much less individual shows.

I'm happy to tell you that there is a way to save a bundle of money every month and still enjoy your can't-miss shows, sports, news and movies. In this guide, I'm going to tell you what it takes, from the software to the hardware.

I know you're going to be excited by what I have to tell you, but be sure to read the whole thing before you make any major decisions. It does take some care and planning to do this right, but the rewards are well worth it.

#### But first: What does cutting the cord even mean?

Before we get going, I do need to clear up a common question: What does it mean to 'cut the cord on cable'? That's because "cable" can mean "cable TV" and "cable internet." Your cable bundle plan might also include phone calling or other extras specific to your provider.

When I say "cutting the cord on cable" I'm talking specifically about cable TV, and that's what I'll mean when I say "cable" for the rest of the guide. Most alternatives to cable TV still require you to have an internet connection, so you don't want to cancel your cable internet, unless you want to switch to a lowercost DSL plan.

Just keep in mind that whatever internet connection you go with, you need at least 3 megabits-per-second download speed. If you have several people in the house and a bunch of gadgets, 10 Mbps would be a better starting point. If you find the internet is just too slow for what you're doing, you can always upgrade your plan.

Also, keep in mind that a bundle cable package includes basic cable. Additionally, phone calls might still be cheaper than a standalone cable internet plan. So be sure to price out the options based on what your provider offers.

Now, without further ado, let's dive into the subject of cutting the cord and saving you money. First, I'm going to tell you about your alternatives to cable, then go into more detail on the services that are available and finally take a look at the hardware you'll need to watch online video on your TV.

#### **Double-check your internet speed**

Want to know what kind of speed you're getting now? Test your speed in less than a minute for FREE with Speedtest.net.

# CABLE ALTERNATIVES



There are three major alternatives to cable, and each one has its own strengths and weaknesses. Don't be afraid to mix and match these options to get the right combination you need to enjoy the entertainment you want.

#### Over-the-air HD broadcasts

If you've had cable for a long time, it's easy to forget that TV is still available for free as over-the-air broadcasts. To pick up these broadcasts, you just need an antenna.

Now, you might be imagining a finicky rabbit-ear antenna or a massive, ugly metal roof antenna that has to be pointed in exactly the right direction. With these, you usually ended up with a static-filled picture and only a handful of channels.

Modern over-the-air broadcasts and antennas are nothing like that. In 2011, over-the-air broadcasts went completely digital and most of them are now in high definition. You can watch your local network channels for news, syndicated and primetime shows, and sports with crystal-clear picture.

Even better, you don't need a touchy or unsightly antenna to pick up these broadcasts. There are stylish indoor HDTV antennas that pick up signals out to 50 miles and blend into any decor. In fact, I was so impressed with indoor HD antennas, and how much money they can save you, that I created my own just for my listeners.

**Allow me to introduce the Komando Indoor Amplified HD Antenna.** Simply plug it in to your TV, place it on the wall and run your TV's channel scan. In less than a minute, you'll be watching over-the-air broadcasts from major networks in 1080p high definition without paying a dime in subscription or contract fees!

The Komando Indoor Amplified HD Antenna has a 50-mile range so you don't miss a station. And its reversible design and razor-thin profile means it can fit in with any home decor or easily hide away.

With the Komando Indoor Amplified HD Antenna, there's no reason to keep paying for cable. Buy it today and start saving money every month.

If you need a bit longer range, <u>outdoor HD antennas</u> are now compact deals that can even fit in some attics. The best part is that you don't have to aim them!

Any of these antennas costs less than a month or two of cable, and after that one-time payment you have free HD TV forever.

#### Click here to buy now

Pluses: Free HD TV for life after initial antenna purchase; lets you downgrade to a less expensive internet plan.

**Minuses:** Show selection limited to network programming; can't watch shows on demand without a third-party digital video recorder; channel selection varies based on location.





#### Online video streaming

When you hear people saying they ditched cable, online streaming is usually what they're using instead. You probably already know the names of the major streaming services: Netflix, Hulu and Amazon (I'll cover these and other services in more detail in Chapter 2).

Simply pay a low subscription fee, usually less than \$9 a month or even free if you don't mind watching commercials and you can watch TV shows and movies on a TV, computer, tablet or smartphone whenever you want.

The idea of watching your favorite shows whenever you want for a low monthly cost is enough to get most people excited about ditching cable. However, predictably, there is a catch or two.

Thanks to licensing costs and legal red tape, no one service can offer a complete library of movies and shows. Each service has its own exclusives and network deals.

And even if a service has a show you like, it might not have all the seasons, or new seasons might only appear months or years after they finish airing. Plus, movies and shows aren't guaranteed to always be there. Netflix, for example, regularly rotates the movies it has available, so you might have to wait months or years for an old favorite to come around again, if it does at all.

Despite those drawbacks, however, streaming services are a valuable cable alternative that millions of people are using. A streaming service can be the center of your cable-less setup if you know how to pick the right one (more on that later).



**Buy if:** Low monthly cost; on-demand streaming; watch videos anywhere on most gadgets.

Pass if: Inconsistent selection of content; minimal options for sports and news; requires fast internet connection.

#### Online video purchasing

Online video purchasing is easy to get confused with online video streaming, because in both cases you're watching videos over the internet. However, there's an important difference.

If online video streaming is an all-you-can-eat buffet, online video purchasing is ordering a single meal. Put another way, online video purchasing is the digital version of buying a DVD or Blu-ray, or a TV season box set.

True, purchasing is more expensive than streaming. A single TV show episode will cost you \$0.99 to \$2.99, and a full season runs \$20 to \$50. However, keep in mind that a single season of a TV show typically lasts 6 months. That works out to around \$4 to \$8 a month.

If you only have one or two TV series you want to watch that aren't available with streaming or over-the-air broadcast, purchasing the episodes will still be less expensive than paying for cable.

The main benefit of purchasing, though, is that there are a lot more TV shows and movies available for purchase than you'll get in an online streaming service. Plus, after you buy the show or movie, you can watch it whenever and wherever you want forever. A streaming service might take it down some day and with cable you might miss it entirely.

If you're more of a cinephile, you can rent or buy recent blockbusters. iTunes, Amazon, and Google Play have robust archives, and many movies are fresh off the big screen. But these downloads can be very expensive: On iTunes, a single HD movie can cost \$19.99 to buy, and many films can't be rented. It's not a cheap alternative to cable, but it does give you that "Pay-Per-View" experience.

Whether or not you get an HD antenna (and I really do recommend it), you're probably going to end up using at least one online video service, probably more. In the next chapter, I'm going to give you some guidelines for picking the best one for you, and go into more detail about the most popular options.



Buy if: Most shows are available for purchase; on-demand streaming; watch videos anywhere on most gadgets; buy videos independent of a streaming service.

Pass if: Higher per-episode and per-season costs vs. streaming; minimal options for sports and news; requires fast internet connection.

# PICKING AN ONLINE VIDEO SERVICE

Before you can make the jump from cable to online video streaming, a little research is in order. You need to carefully consider what services have the shows and movies you want so you don't end up overspending on multiple services or missing a show that's important.

Start by making a list of the shows you watch and the networks that carry the shows you enjoy the most.

Once you have the list, head over to a site called <u>"Can I Stream It?"</u> This will tell you what online services carry the shows and movies you want to watch. See which service gives you the most content and then how much it will cost to fill in the gaps with a second streaming service or per-episode purchases.

You should also pay attention to networks. If you tend to watch shows on USA, FOX, Disney, or something else, you'll want to pick a service that carries that network's shows. It will be more likely your next favorite show will be available later.

#### Things to remember:

- Be sure you check for more than one season of a show. Hulu
  for example, has many of the latest episodes for currently airing
  shows, but not earlier seasons. Netflix is more likely to have older
  seasons of shows, but has to wait until a season finishes airing to
  add the episodes, sometimes more than a year later.
- Don't forget about sports. You'll need to check out each of the major sports websites (MLB, NFL, NBA, ESPN) and see what streaming packages they offer and how much they cost. In most cases, you'll find that an HD antenna is the best deal for watching live sports.

One good thing is that every major video service has a free trial period. You can sign up and see if you like it and how much you use it before you commit.

Now let's look at the most popular services to see what they offer.





#### **Netflix**

Netflix is the site that made streaming video popular and it still has the best range of movies and shows for the average person. It also has a decent recommendation system for finding new shows to watch.

In addition to movies and TV shows, it has critically acclaimed original content. You can catch shows like "Orange is the New Black," "House of Cards," and the fourth season of "Arrested Development."

The Netflix app is the nicest to use on every gadget I've tried it on. Families will like Netflix's support for multiple users, which keeps queues cleaner and recommendations more helpful for individual family members.

There's also a dedicated "Kids" section. This gives kids their own space on your Netflix account so they can safely browse all kids' content on Netflix without finding anything offensive.

There's plenty more good stuff on Netflix, including some nifty tricks to improve your Netflix experience.

Streaming plans start at \$8.99 a month and there's a one-month free trial.

Buy if: Best selection of content for most people; original programming; dedicated profiles and kids section; solid app; monthly plans; app works on any gadget.

Pass if: Prices increase more often than other services; current TV shows not available until months after they air.

#### **Amazon Prime Instant Video**

Amazon actually has two streaming services, which can get confusing. Amazon Instant Video is for online purchasing and has a video library covering most TV shows and movies that have been converted to digital formats.

Amazon Prime Instant Video is Amazon's subscription streaming service and offers a smaller library of movies and TV shows. When you're browsing Amazon, you can tell if a video is available on Prime because it will say Prime in the upper corner of the video's thumbnail image.

Amazon Prime's selection isn't quite as good as Netflix, but it does have some compensations. Prime also includes free two-day shipping on any Amazon order, access to the Kindle eBook lending library and Amazon Prime Music streaming. It's also the only service that has a deal with HBO to stream popular HBO shows, although that doesn't include "Game of Thrones."

If you're purchasing a TV series as it airs, Amazon Instant Video has a Season Pass feature that lets you buy and watch new TV show episodes at a discount over buying the entire season after it has aired. You can also buy and watch movies that are still in the theater.

The Amazon app, which streams videos from both Prime and Instant Video, is decent on many gadgets, although the app is newer to Android smartphones. Amazon isn't supported on some third-party streaming gadgets like Apple TV or Chromecast. Amazon is really hoping you'll buy its Fire tablets and Fire TV streaming gadgets.

Amazon Prime costs \$99 a year, or \$49 for students. There is no monthly payment option, but there is a free trial.

Pros: Strong video library; original shows; HBO deal; Amazon Prime perks; Season Pass with Instant Video for watching on-air TV shows.

Cons: No monthly payment option; confusing overlap between Instant Video and Prime Instant Video; doesn't work with Apple TV or Chromecast; running TV shows not available on Prime until months after they air.

#### Hulu/Hulu Plus

One drawback to most subscription streaming services like Netflix and Amazon Prime is that they don't have TV shows until months or years after the current season ends. You either have to wait, or buy it episode by episode with a video purchasing service. If you're looking for a way to watch popular TV shows as they air, Hulu is the place to go.

The free version of Hulu has plenty of current TV series available to watch, as long as you don't mind sitting through commercials. You also need to watch regularly because free Hulu only has the latest five episodes available.

The paid Hulu Plus has a wider range of shows, more episodes and seasons available per show and fewer commercials.

Hulu also has ad-supported movies, as well as original content available. Hulu is probably the closest to an actual on-demand TV station, as it was originally built and funded by NBC.

The Hulu app is available for most streaming video gadgets, but you'll need a Hulu Plus subscription to use it. You can watch free Hulu on smartphones and tablets using the Hulu app, or in your browser on any computer.

Hulu Plus costs \$7.99 a month and there is a free trial.

#### YouTube

The most popular video site online isn't actually that great for cutting the cord. Don't get me wrong, all major streaming boxes and smart TVs support watching videos on YouTube.

If you're a fan of YouTube personalities and channels (like mine), then it's a great way to keep up with them. For movies and TV shows, however, the cost to rent or own them is a little higher than other services. It has the same selection of items as Google Play, by the way.

**Pros:** Watch TV episodes for ongoing shows; free version.

Cons: Lots of commercials, even with the paid version; episode posting is up to a month behind with free version; need Hulu Plus to use the app on most gadgets.

**Pros:** Free; works on any gadget; endless content

**Cons:** Ads; major TV shows and movies are rent/own only

#### Crackle

If you like comedy, melodrama, or 1980s action movies, Crackle is the free streaming service for you. Crackle boasts every episode of "Seinfeld" ever made, along with a series where Jerry Seinfeld interviews popular comedians of today.

Crackle is ad-supported, and feels the most to me like a channel that plays TV movies all day. Not made-for-TV movies, though, these are the attention-grabbing movies that work well with Crackle's adsupported business model.

It's supported on almost every device, and can run all of its videos in full HD.

#### **Pros:** Free

**Cons:** Ads, very narrow focus of content.

#### **Apple iTunes**

iTunes is the granddaddy of media marketplaces, first with music and then with videos, books and apps. Like Amazon Instant Video, it has just about every TV show and video you could want to watch, and you can buy or rent any of them at competitive prices.

It's a solid service, but you need to be a real Apple person to use it. iTunes content will only play on an Apple TV, iPhone, iPad, iPod touch, Mac or PC. If you have a household that includes gadgets from any other manufacturer, such an Android smartphone or Xbox game console, you're not going to be able to play the content you've purchased on them.

## Pros: Wide selection of videos; excellent streaming to compatible gadgets; behind-the-scenes extras, deleted scenes and more available with some movies.

**Cons:** Playback limited to Apple gadgets and PC.

#### **Google Play**

Google Play is Google's answer to iTunes. It lets you buy videos, music, books and apps, and it has a good selection of TV shows and movies available for purchase. It also offers 99 cent rentals.

Originally, Google Play had the same problem as iTunes in that it really only worked with Android smartphones. However, Google has added more compatible streaming products, like the Chromecast, Nexus Player and Android TV, and some third-party streaming gadgets, like the popular Roku, now have access as well.

Pros: Carries the newest popular shows and new movies; competitive prices; pull up "info card" during the movie to learn more about actors and soundtrack.

Cons: Video library doesn't feel as complete as Amazon and iTunes; doesn't work with Amazon's streaming gadgets.

#### **Sling TV**

While this service is aimed at "cord cutters," it's a bit different. In fact, it's from Dish Network, which is a satellite TV provider.

For \$20 a month, Sling TV gives you 14 cable channels, called "The Best of Live TV," that you can stream to your TV (with a compatible streaming gadget) or a computer, tablet or smartphone. The 14 channels are cable basics like ESPN, Disney Channel, TNT, Food Network, ABC Family, CNN and others. Plus three extra channel-packs geared toward sports, kids and news. You can add any of them for an extra \$5 a month each. You won't get any major networks or premium channels like HBO, though.

Unlike the other services, Sling TV streams live TV, not on-demand. So you are going to see the same commercials you'd see on regular TV. On a few select channels, you can pause the live TV stream, but that's about it. If you miss a show, Sling TV offers "3 Day Replay," so you can watch previously aired shows within three days. Sling has videos on demand, as well as a new "Kids Extra" add-on for \$5 per month. Other comparable live cable TV streaming services include Playstation Vue and DirecTV Now.

**Pros:** Basic cable channels for a lower cost than cable; works on computers and mobile gadgets; no contract.

**Cons:** Limited hardware support; expensive compared to other streaming options; commercials; weak video-ondemand options so far.

#### **HBO NOW**

The newest contender in streaming is HBO NOW. Up until this point, HBO's streaming service, HBO GO, required a cable subscription to use.

HBO NOW works more like Netflix or Amazon Prime where you pay a monthly fee and can watch HBO's entire library of shows, such as "Game of Thrones," True Detective," "True Blood," "The Wire" and plenty more, on demand without a cable subscription.

What's the difference between HBO NOW and HBO GO? They are both streaming services, but HBO GO is free with HBO's cable network subscription. But HBO GO is not an alternative to cable, and it won't help you cut the cord. HBO NOW is currently available on almost any device. Your app is free with a subscription, and you can download it from iTunes. You can also use any Mac or Windows browser to access it.

The only potential downside is the price: \$15 a month. While that's much less than a cable subscription, that's still nearly double Netflix or any other streaming service. Don't forget that HBO has a deal with Amazon Prime to stream older HBO shows.

Pros: Carries the newest popular shows and new movies; competitive prices; pull up "info card" during the movie to learn more about actors and soundtrack.

Cons: Video library doesn't feel as complete as Amazon and iTunes; doesn't work with Amazon's streaming gadgets.

# 3 WHAT HARDWARE DO YOU NEED?

Once you have an idea of the services you want to use, it's time to pick your hardware. Any of the services will work on a computer, tablet or smartphone, but no one wants to gather the family around a 10-inch tablet screen when you have a 42-inch TV in the living room.

To bring internet video to a TV, you need a streaming box, video-game console or smart TV. There are multiple versions of each option that vary wildly in cost and what they can do.

Most streaming options support the major streaming services, i.e. Hulu, Amazon and Netflix, along with free services like Crackle, YouTube and Vimeo. They might also have streaming music like Pandora and Spotify, along with game apps, sports apps and custom apps for niche websites that cover fitness, religion, podcasts and other subjects.

Here's what you'll need to keep in mind:

- The streaming services you picked above
- The sports sites you want to stream, if any
- Free online video sites you use
- Other online media sites you use

Next, hit up each streaming gadget and see how many of the services you need are supported. This can get a little tricky.

If you need iTunes support, for example, then you're stuck with Apple TV. Just be aware it won't play video from Amazon. If you want Amazon services, then Google's streamers are out, and if you want Google Play, then there goes Amazon's gadgets.

You might also think about local media. If you want to stream home movies from your computer to your TV, Roku has the Plex Media Server app, and PlayStation and Xbox support DLNA. DLNA lets you stream media from a Windows computer and other compatible gadgets. You could also look for a gadget that has a USB port that lets you plug in a flash drive with pictures, music or videos on it.

Also look at extra features. Apple TV supports Airplay to stream media from iPad, iPhone and Mac, while Roku can stream media from iOS and Android using the Roku app. Fire TV has voice control and strong gaming abilities and Google's Nexus Player can load any of the 1+ million apps in the Google Play store.

To help you out, I'm going to cover the top streaming hardware on the market.

#### **Amazon's Fire TV**

Amazon is no stranger to media or gadgets, so it's no surprise it has the Fire TV line of gadgets. The original Fire TV is a little black box that plugs into your TV via HDMI cable and sends high definition 1080p video and Dolby Digital Plus surround sound.

Fire TV has some of the most powerful hardware of any streaming gadget. It includes a quad-core processor, dedicated graphics system, 2 gigabytes of memory, and dual-band, dual-antenna Wi-Fi. Fire TV is a high-end streaming gadget and it starts at \$90.

Amazon also makes the Fire TV Stick. This looks like a USB flash drive, but plugs right into your TV's HDMI port. It isn't as powerful as the Fire TV, but it has the same features and only costs \$40.

As you'd expect, the Fire TV line is built to connect to an Amazon Prime or Instant Video account, as well as Amazon Music. It also supports other major services like Netflix, Hulu Plus, YouTube, Pandora, Crackle and many more.

The Fire TV runs a modified version of Android so it can handle the same apps as the Kindle Fire and other Android tablets, including popular video games. There's even a \$40 Amazon Fire Game Controller you can buy for more serious gaming.

In addition, Amazon included some other cool features like an easy-to-use voice search through its remote's built-in microphone. It offers a new feature called FreeTime that lets you create a profile customized for kids and will let you limit their screen time.

Not sure what you want to watch? It has a feature called ASAP that predicts what you'd like and starts buffering it even before you choose it. That way streaming is immediate and you don't have to wait.

You can download the Amazon Fire TV app to control it with your smartphone or tablet. It also supports Plex for streaming movies, music, photos and more from your computer.



Buy if: You want high-end hardware and software with all the bells and whistles; you want access to Amazon's full library of apps, including more than 300 games.

Pass if: You want to spend less than \$100 (Fire TV only); you want iTunes or Google Play support; you don't want another box cluttering up your entertainment center (Fire TV only).

#### **Apple TV**

The Apple TV has been around since 2007 and it has a well-deserved reputation for power and simplicity.

While older Apple TVs had limited software and were mostly just iTunes media portals, this all changed with the fourth-generation Apple TV.

Introduced in 2015, the fourth-generation Apple TV runs on a specifically designed operating system called "tvOS." Unlike its predecessors, newer Apple TVs support a dedicated app store where you can choose from an ever-growing selection of apps and games.

To run these apps and games, Apple beefed up the Apple TV with a powerful A8 processor and a choice between 32GB (\$149 or 64GB (\$199 of internal storage, leaving its predecessors in the dust.

Other features include an all-new touch remote control that doubles as a motion control gaming device and with its built-in mic, you can take advantage of its advanced voice navigation and search via Siri.

Content-wise, aside from iTunes content and apps for popular video streaming services like Netflix, Hulu Plus, HBO Now, Crackle, Sling TV and YouTube, the current Apple TV also has a vast library of TV, weather, sports and shopping apps plus casual and even console quality games.

And it gets better if you're an iPhone, iPad or Mac user since the Apple TV can mirror your gadget's display and output it to your TV via AirPlay. With this feature, you can even stream non-Apple TV supported services like Amazon Video, Vudu and Google Play from your iPhone or iPad similar to the Google Chromecast's casting function.

The Apple TV is pricier than the other streaming gadgets available but for its excellent ecosystem and the wealth of things it can do, it is well worth the look.



**Buy if:** tvOS ecosystem is growing; can double as a gaming console; excellent integration with other Apple services and gadgets; Siri voice control.

Pass if: Expensive; no native apps for Amazon Video, Vudu and Google Play.

#### **Google Chromecast**

The first generation Chromecast was a little USB drive-sized stick. It was the first to plug right into your TV's HDMI so it stays out of the way. Google changed its form factor to a hockey puck-like disk for the second generation and expanded the Chromecast line into three models - the regular Chromecast, the Chromecast Audio for audio-only streaming and the Chromecast Ultra for 4K video.

Unlike the other gadgets that connect to the internet and stream videos directly, Chromecast get its content from your computer, smartphone or tablet.

For example, you can fire up the Netflix app on your smartphone, or load up a YouTube video in the Chrome browser on your computer, and then push a special button. The content is immediately sent to your TV via Wi-Fi. Your computer or gadget then acts like a remote control.

The best part is that you can still use your phone, tablet or laptop while the video is streaming. You can surf the web or use another app while you're watching your show. You can even start watching on one gadget and let another gadget take full control.

The Chrome browser compatibility is nice because you can play just about any web video and stream it to your TV. It can even handle Amazon videos, if you choose to use Flash for them instead of Silverlight in Amazon's player settings. On the other hand, the Chromecast won't work with any other browser like Firefox or internet Explorer if you prefer those.

#### **Chromecast ULTRA**

Allows users to stream up to 4K Ultra HD and HDR with stunning picture and lightning speed over your WiFi network. This device uses your TV's HDMI port and is fast and reliable with very little buffering.

Use your iPhone®, iPad®, Android device, or laptop to stream thousands of Cast-enabled apps.

With a \$69 price tag, this option is tailored to those who want the best streaming quality possible without breaking the bank.



**Buy if:** You want a low-cost streaming option; you need something cheap for a second TV.

Pass if: You don't want to keep a smartphone, tablet or computer handy to stream videos; you want game apps; you need access to Amazon Prime or Instant Video (outside of Chrome).



**Buy if:** You want to stream 4K resolution video and imagery to your Ultra HD TV.

Pass if: You do not own a 4K TV; you do not have highspeed internet above 50mbps

#### Roku

Roku is a long-time contender in the streaming market and for good reason. It combines solid hardware and software at affordable prices.

With Roku's current lineup, you have six options: the Roku Express (\$30, the Roku Express+ (\$40, the Roku Streaming Stick (\$50, the Roku Premiere (\$80, the Roku Premiere+ (\$100 and the Roku Ultra (\$130.

All of them can connect via HDMI, but the Roku Express+ also includes a composite output - those yellow, white and red connectors used for older TVs.

The Express models and the Streaming Stick can output up to 1080p HD but if you're gearing up for 4K video, you'll need the Premiere or Ultra models. For advanced HDR support, you'll have to shell out for the Premiere+ or Ultra.

Form factor wise, all of the Rokus are little external boxes except for the Streaming Stick, which is about the size of a USB flash drive and plugs directly into your TV's HDMI port. If you're after a clean look or trying to save space, the Streaming Stick is worth a look.

All models have built-in Wi-Fi but if you prefer the reliability of a wired connection, the Premiere+ and the Ultra also sport an Ethernet port.

Roku's hardware is excellent for the price but how about its software? Well, since Roku is considered to have more of a neutral ecosystem, it has the widest selection of video "channels" among all the available streaming gadgets. In fact, almost every major video service is available.

Roku's ecosystem has more than 700 "channels" and you'll find competing services like Amazon Video, Vudu, FandangoNow, Google Play side-by-side with Netflix, Hulu Plus, Crackle, HBO Go, YouTube and Sling TV. Keep in mind, though, that like other non-Apple streaming boxes, the Rokus do not support iTunes content.

And Roku doesn't just offer video content. It also has a wide variety of games you can download and play.

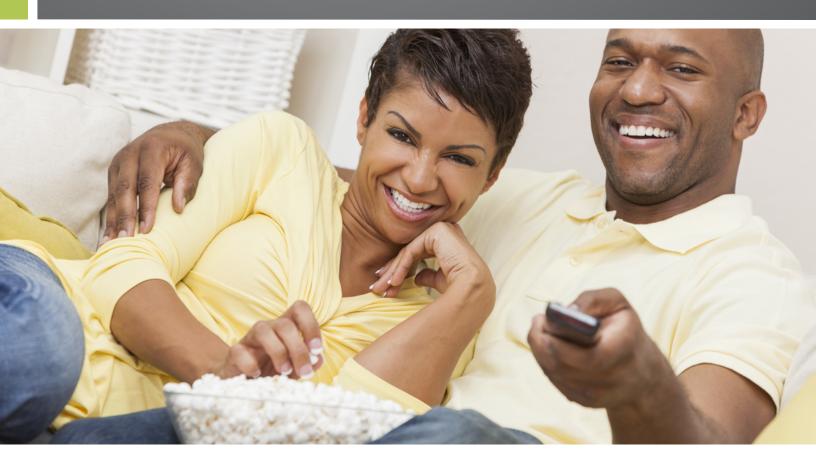
Another feature that's worth mentioning is the built-in headphone jack on the remote of the Premiere+ and Ultra models for private watching. For added convenience, the Roku Ultra also supports voice search via its remote's built-in mic.

For price and performance, the Roku brand is one of the best choices out there. You'll definitely want to put its streaming gadgets near the top of your list of options.



**Buy if:** Supports the widest variety of streaming services; best bang for your buck; Express+ works with older TVs.

Pass if: No iTunes support.



#### **Smart TVs and Blu-ray players**

You might not need to spring for a third-party streaming box if you already have, or are planning to buy, a "smart" TV or Blu-ray player. These connect to the internet and have streaming apps and services built right in.

The apps and services available will depend on the manufacturers. Some makers have their own special software while some use third-party software like Android TV.

However, in general they'll all support the major streaming services: Netflix, Amazon, Hulu, YouTube, etc. Still, if you're buying a smart gadget you'll want to check to make sure the services you want are available. There's no sense spending extra money for something "smart" and then having to buy a third-party gadget later to add something it doesn't have.

Cyber-security experts have also noted that these devices are susceptible to ransomware, which can turn a relaxing night on the sofa into a nightmare. At the moment, traditional TVs with a digital hookup are much safer and more consistent.



**Buy if:** You're buying a new TV or Blu-ray player anyway; it has the streaming services you want.

Pass if: You want a low-cost solution; you aren't planning to buy a new TV or Blu-ray player.

#### Video game consoles

Video game consoles like the Sony PlayStation 4 (\$350), Microsoft Xbox One S (\$299) and Nintendo Wii U (\$300) do so much more than just play games. They're also full-fledged home media entertainment units.

That means they include options to streaming video from Netflix, Amazon, Hulu, etc. If you have one of these consoles, then you might not need to buy anything else.

If you're planning to buy one, then I would hold off on getting anything else. The console might do everything you need.

#### DIY

You might already have a streaming gadget in your home and not realize it. I told you above that you can use a computer, tablet or smartphone with Google's Chromecast to send video to your TV. However, you can also connect a computer, tablet or smartphone directly to your TV.

All you need is a computer, tablet or smartphone with an HDMI port and the right HDMI cable. Simply plug the gadget into your TV and it becomes a second screen. Anything your gadget can play, you can see on your TV.

If you have an older computer, it probably doesn't have HDMI, but it probably has DVI. You can buy DVI-to-HDMI adapters. Your TV also might have a DVI port as well. Just note that you might not be able to play videos from some services like Amazon since it requires security technology found in HDMI to work right.

If all you have to work with on both your computer and TV is VGA, then go for another option. You won't get an HD signal over VGA and you're effectively wasting your TV's capabilities.



**Buy if:** You're planning to buy a video game console anyway.

Pass if: You want a low-cost solution.



**Buy if:** You already own a computer, tablet or smartphone that will work.

Pass if: You don't want your gadget permanently tethered to your TV; you don't have a gadget that will work.

### CONCLUSION



As you can see, there are many options for ditching cable. At times that can be confusing, but it also means that with good planning, you can build the entertainment system you've always dreamed of having.

And remember, you don't have to take the plunge all at once. Take advantage of free trials to test the waters on streaming services even before you disconnect your cable TV. Spring for one of the less-expensive streaming boxes to see how well it fits into your life. Even if you upgrade to a more-expensive option later, you can still use it on a second TV or give it to someone else who's dipping their toes in the cable-cutting water.

One purchase that you can't go wrong in making, however, is the Komando Indoor Amplified HD Antenna. It gives you the same basic channels, syndicated and primetime TV shows, local news and sports as cable for the cost of less than two months of cable service, and no contract. Plus, they're in full high-definition. Click here to buy this money-saving must-have today.

On a final note, the cable-cutting revolution is changing rapidly. A streaming service you use might get a killer new feature and you might not realize it. That streaming gadget you have your eye on might drop in price. A must-have new service or gadget might launch tomorrow and make everything else obsolete.

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