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## The Ultimate Cord-Cutting Guide Part 3: Devices & Equipment

10-12 minutes

While a digital antenna will help secure your local channels, you'll probably be left wanting more. Fortunately, there are some great devices designed to give you access to tons of Streaming TV content.

### Computer TV Tuner

For the techie DIY enthusiast, the most cost effective solution for your DVR needs may be repurposing a computer you already have. Using a TV Tuner (available in USB or internal card models) and software like NextPVR, you can build your own DVR solution for a fraction of the cost of the aforementioned retail models. We will talk more about these DIY-type builds in a bit.



### Hardware & Equipment

Once you have made your decisions about the content you want, the next important step is figuring out how to actually watch it. Your cable company made life easy (and cashed in) by renting you cable boxes to deliver their content to all of your televisions. Part of cutting the cord involves figuring out how to get your content to the screens where you want to watch it. As with everything else, what you need depends largely upon what you want.

### Over-the-Air Broadcast TV Signals

If your cord-cutting plan includes watching over-the-air broadcasts with an HD antenna, odds are you can simply tie in your new antenna to the coaxial wiring that used to run to all of your cable boxes. If your TVs were made within the last 10 years, you should be able to plug a coaxial cable into the TV's coaxial jack, scan for channels, and be on your way.

For older TVs you will need an analog to digital converter for your TV to be able to interpret the new digital standard. For less than \$30 you can get a model like the [Mediasonic Homeworx HW180STB](#) that not only will convert the signal correctly, but offers extra features like DVR capabilities (when user-provided USB storage is connected), the ability to output video using several formats, and a remote.

Cheaper options with less frills can be found at just about any local or big-box electronics store for even less.

If you have TVs that are located far away from your HD Antenna, consider replacing your cable-splitter with a signal amplifier to ensure the sound and image quality does not diminish along long cable runs.

## Internet-Connected Streaming Devices

If streaming services are part of your cord-cutting plan, you will need a way to bring those subscriptions to your screens. In some cases, between gaming consoles and internet-connected smart TVs, you may already have what you need. If not, here are some of the best options:

### Roku



Roku has maintained a strong presence in the streaming market since the early days. What was once a brand built around a single, humble streaming box has expanded to include options that range from the powerful 4K-enabled Roku Premiere+ to the affordable, petite, and less conspicuous Roku Express. Roku technology has even been incorporated into some models of Smart TVs.

With all the available choices, the model of Roku you choose largely depends upon the features and interfaces you want the device to connect to. Prices range from \$29.99 for the Roku Express to \$129.99 for the 4K Roku Ultra. Regardless of your choice, however, you get a powerful streaming device that comes ready to work with nearly every streaming content provider out there.

The interface is sleek and easy to use. Navigation is a breeze thanks to an intuitive remote design that, in some cases, even includes voice-enabled searching. If you are looking for an easy way to “smarten-up” your TVs and get them ready for the cable-free life, Rokus are a solid choice.

### Apple TV



If you're already plugged into the Apple ecosystem, Apple TV may be your best bet for a fully-featured streaming device. If cost is a concern, however, Apple TV's hefty \$149 entry-level price tag may be a bit much to swallow, especially if you are looking to purchase multiple cable box replacements.

In terms of interface, Apple TV's new tvOS is snappy, sharp, and easy to use. Apple mainstays like Siri, the App Store, and Apple Music are all featured prominently on the device.

An added benefit Apple TV has over Roku devices is the ability to mirror content from your Mac, iPhone, or iPad to the Apple TV. This makes it easy and intuitive to bring a web page, image, or video from your portable devices to the big screen.

While the streaming service compatibility and stylish features of the Apple TV are impressive, if you aren't already an "Apple person", a Roku device is probably a more cost-effective option.

## Amazon Fire TV

amazon fire TV



Amazon's foray into the streaming device market comes in two major flavors, the flagship Amazon Fire TV for \$89.99 and the smaller, more affordable Amazon Fire TV Stick for \$39.99.

The choice between the two options ultimately boils down to what you are looking for in terms of output ports and resolution. Both versions come with voice-enabled remotes and offer access to essentially the same content (there are some differences, but none that are particularly significant to those without cable subscriptions and/or an interest in gaming).

If you need dedicated Ethernet-in, audio-out, and/or 4K resolution, you need the more expensive Fire TV box. If you can get by with 1080p resolution and Wi-Fi internet capability, the Fire TV Stick will serve you just fine.

In terms of service compatibility, the Amazon Fire TVs tend to fall in line with the competitors. The ability to run DIY media-streaming program Plex (which the Roku cannot but the Apple TV can) is also a major plus for fans of more DIY-friendly media setups (more on that later).

If you are deciding between Roku, Apple, and Amazon streaming products, a lot comes down to personal preference with things like price, interface, and remote layout. They all do what they set out to do reliably enough to be an upgrade from the cable box life.

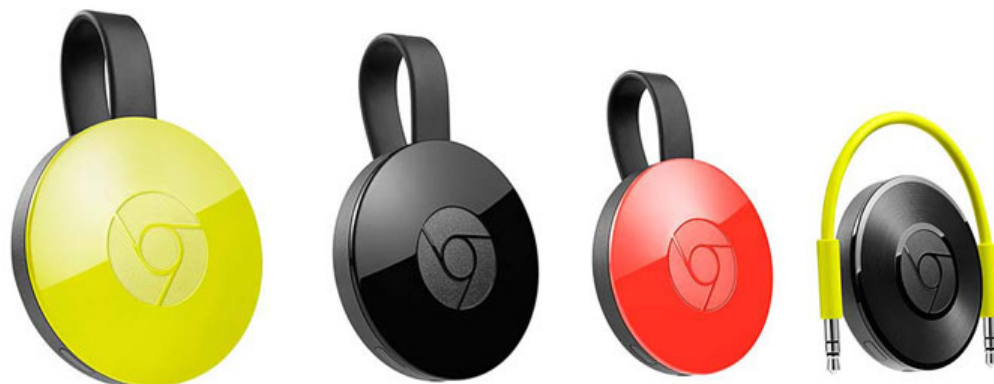
## Video Game Consoles

An interesting alternative to dedicated streaming devices is using a gaming console as your de facto cable box replacement.

Dating back to the Nintendo Wii, Sony PlayStation 3, and Microsoft Xbox 360, game consoles have come equipped (to varying degrees) with the capability to connect to video-streaming services.

Modern incarnations like the Xbox One and PlayStation 4 offer enhanced performance and, in some cases, enhanced resolutions when compared to their last-gen counterparts. If you have one of these devices, you can save a few bucks and install the apps for your favorite streaming services right alongside your favorite video games.

## Google Chromecast



I'm going to go out on a limb and assume you have a smartphone. If you don't, I'm impressed you're even reading this article. If you already have internet-capable devices like smartphones, tablets, or computers available in your home, Google's Chromecast (\$35) could prove to be an inexpensive way to use those devices as the sources for your streaming content. You plug the Chromecast into your TV's HDMI port, supply it with some USB power, and connect it to your network.

Chromecast is unique in that it doesn't come with a remote or any real interface to speak of. Instead, you use a Chromecast app to your mobile device or a plugin installed in your Google Chrome web browser to stream content directly to the Chromecast.

Once a stream is started from your secondary device and sent to the Chromecast, the Chromecast takes over the streaming duties using its internal Wi-Fi connection (the more expensive Chromecast Ultra also includes a wired Ethernet connection). Your smartphone remains in control of the stream, but it isn't providing the horsepower driving your media anymore.

Chromecast is a great, cheap solution for bringing digital content to your TVs as long as the viewers in your household have devices to use to control their streaming content.

## Smart TVs and Blu-ray Players

If you've purchased a TV or blue-ray player in the last 2-years, there's a good chance you have access to wide selection of streaming TV apps. At the very least, you're likely to have access to Netflix and Hulu. In order to access streaming services from your smart TV or Blue-ray player, you'll have to make sure it's connected to the internet.

## Home Theater Personal Computers (HTPCs)

For the computer-savvy, you won't find better compatibility and customizability than a home theater PC.

To include: android tv, raspberry pi, higher powered htpc options, tv tuners

Home Media Servers (Plex, Kodi – the legal uses) – thinking of cutting this since there is no real benefit without going into how to strip DRM out of downloaded movies and episodes or rip content from discs (which apparently are dicey legal territory)

## DVR Equipment

Lastly, there are standalone DVRs that you can buy and record broadcast TV through your antenna. With this method, you could record prime time shows, kids shows and the football games on Sunday. All you have to do is connect your coax cable coming out of the wall to the DVR, then from the DVR to your TV.



Some higher-end models like the [Tivo Bolt](#) come with added bells and whistles like the ability to access your streaming service subscriptions (more on that later), 4k resolution support, the ability to watch shows at 130% speed with pitch-corrected audio, quad-tuners (so you can record up to 4 shows at the same time), and a smart commercial skip algorithm. Unfortunately, for all of these features, you'll be on the hook for a \$15 a month subscription and a full year commitment (sound familiar?).

The [Channel Master OTA DVR+](#) is a much stronger offering for cord-cutters seeking to limit the shackles of contracts and recurring fees. At only \$249 for the unit plus \$55 for 1 TB worth of external storage (you can choose any external USB storage option depending upon how much space you need), the Channel Master option does not require any monthly fees or service plans. You buy the unit and it is yours to use, fully featured with dual tuners (watch one thing while recording another) and streaming content integration comparable to the Tivo Bolt.

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