

[www.cutthecord.com /cord-cutting-guide/top-cable-tv-alternatives/](http://www.cutthecord.com/cord-cutting-guide/top-cable-tv-alternatives/)

The Ultimate Cord-Cutting Guide Part 4: Streaming TV Services

15-19 minutes

Over the past five years, there has been a steady increase in web-based streaming services that provide users with libraries of on-demand video content in exchange for a moderate subscription fee. The one you're probably most familiar with is Netflix. You pay a low monthly price and can cancel anytime.

For most cord-cutters, the void left by a cancelled cable subscription can be filled by one or more streaming options. Ultimately, it comes down to the shows and movies you are looking for and how much you are willing to pay.

Be warned, just like with cable-based on-demand services, content like movies, TV shows, documentaries tend to come and go as the agreements between the major studios and subscription services ebb and flow. It is not uncommon to shift between different combinations of services in response to the content you want to see. The good news is that, unlike cable, you typically are not bound by expensive, long-term contracts trying to lock you to particular services. If you choose, you can play a much more active role in selecting the content that comes to your televisions.

It's important to divide streaming services into two camps: 1) Streaming with Live TV and 2) On-Demand Content

The On-Demand players are the ones you're most familiar with: Netflix, Hulu, Amazon Prime. The new wave of streaming services like Sling TV and Hulu + Live TV combine the simplicity of Netflix with the ability to watch and record live television like you would with Comcast or DirecTV.

Live TV Streaming Service Comparison

As cord-cutting has risen in popularity, cable subscriptions have naturally begun to decrease. Many of the channel providers who rely on cable subscriptions as the cornerstone of their business model have had to take proactive approaches to carve out a niche in a world without cable to ensure their survival.

The benefit to the cord-cutting consumer is a rise in streaming "a la carte" options that allow users to create customized versions of the cable service they abandoned. In theory, you can create a customized mix of channels at a fraction of the cost of a cable plan and without all the bloat of channels you won't watch. As with all services, however, some do a better job of this than others.

Hulu + Live TV



Hulu Live (Hulu + Live TV) Launched May of 2017 with 50+ channels and on demand content.

Price: [\\$44.99 per month](#)

Free Trial: [First Month Free](#)

Subscription Term: Month to month

Content: Programming includes Live local and regional TV service, but it's subject to availability—certain channels and some content may not be available everywhere or on all devices. The cornerstone of Hulu Live's television content is produced by four major broadcast networks, ABC, CBS, FOX and NBC. These networks have partnered to develop Hulu in all of its incarnations. Available sports programming includes CBS Sports, ESPN, Fox Sports, NBC Sports and TNT, as well as regional sports networks available in many markets, News channels include CNN, CNBC, Fox News, Fox Business and MSNBC. Get the same access to the regular Hulu on demand library and gain live streaming for most channels like sports and news including your local stations (depending on your location). This is a very competitive service in the cord cutting space especially regarding their partnership with Disney and the upcoming launch of Disney+ (Fall of 2019).

Sling TV



For cord-cutters who are leery about giving up access to cable mainstays like ESPN, major cable news outlets, and even HGTV, Sling provides a training-wheels approach to cord cutting. By subscribing to their monthly service, you can customize a plan that gives you access to many of the most-watched cable channels via high-quality internet streams.

Instead of renting a cable-box, you use a phone, tablet, computer or any number of commercially-available streaming devices to stream your channels.

Price: Varies by channel package – \$25/month for Sling Orange, \$25/month for Sling Blue, and \$40/month for both. Options are available with various add-on packages ranging from \$5 to \$15. The ability to use the service on multiple devices at once costs extra.

Free Trial: [Sling TV offers users a one-time 7-day free trial](#)

Subscription Term: Month to month

Content: Sling offers a solid selection of cable channels as well as local options in select markets. Some channels even offer on-demand options and show replays.

Verdict:

If over-the-air broadcasts either aren't enough or aren't available in your area, Sling is a good option for maintaining access to traditional television channels.

Be aware, depending on the package and streaming options you are looking for, Sling's price can start to add up (especially when you factor in your associated internet costs and the one-time purchases of any streaming devices you may need – more on these issues later). The good news is that without long-term contracts, you can literally add or drop services each month until you hone in on the package that strikes the right balance between price and channels.

AT&T Now (Formerly DirecTV Now)



Originally, the most direct competitor to Sling TV is a mainstay of the subscription television market, was DirecTV Now. After the merger with AT&T, DirecTV Now was re-branded into **AT&T Now** and has the most expensive options for live streaming television but also the packages with the most channels. The streaming service, in many ways, is the closest thing you will get to a traditional cable experience but also has the price tag to go along with it. Another thing to note as a cord cutter, when signing up for AT&T Now, you also have the option to check internet packages available in your area and can bundle internet with your streaming package which could help save you money each month.

Price: \$50 to \$135+/month depending on the package

Free Trial: [AT&T Now offers users a one-time 7-day free trial](#)

Subscription Term: Month to month

Content: AT&T Now offers 6 tiers of channel packages and one latino channel package, each with increasing numbers of channels for an increase in cost. Local Fox, NBC, CBS and ABC stations are available in select markets. You can check if locals are available when you start the check-out process and enter your zip [here](#).

Verdict:

AT&T Now seems to want to offer you the full cable experience as a streaming option You may not save as much as with other streaming services but if you bundle and switch to AT&T internet with your streaming package, it may make some financial sense. If you have to have all the channels you would get with a cable/satellite provider – this may be a good option to check out.

Playstation Vue



Price: \$49.99/month (Access, 45+ channels); \$54.99/month (Core, 60+ channels); \$64.99/month (Elite, 90 channels); \$84.99/month (Ultra, 90 channels plus HBO & SHO)

Free Trial: [PS Vue offers users a one-time 5-day free trial - Click Here](#)

Subscription Term: Month to month

Content: PS Vue offers 4 tiers of channel packages, each with increasing numbers of channels for an increase in cost. Local Fox, NBC, CBS and ABC stations are available in select markets.

YouTube TV



YouTube TV will offer a single package of 70+ channels.

Price: \$49.99/month

Free Trial: [7 Days](#)

Subscription Term: Most likely month to month

Content: A very large collection of popular channels, live TV, news and sports channels. This is a great service to try out especially if you are a “Google” fan but the app is available on all major devices and easy to use anywhere.

Let’s talk about the On-Demand Streaming providers:

On-Demand Streaming Providers

Not all streaming services are created equal. Netflix, Amazon Prime, and Hulu represent three of the biggest players in the game. If you are looking to find a streaming service filled to the brim with content, these three represent the best places to start.

Netflix



Once upon a time, Netflix was simply a mail-order DVD rental service with a small content streaming component on the side. Now, Netflix represents, in many people’s view, the gold standard for streaming content services. A recent [survey](#) of 1,211 households in the United States showed that 54% of adults subscribe to Netflix.

Price: \$8.99/month (1 screen); \$12.99/month (2 screens); \$15.99/month (4 screens). Netflix’s pricing structure changes depending upon how many screens you want to be able to use the service on at the same time.

Free Trial: Netflix offers users a one-time 30-day free trial

Subscription Term: Month to month

Content: Netflix offers a large selection of movies, television series, documentaries, children's content, and comedy specials, as well as a growing stable of original content.

Verdict: If you are looking to keep your subscription costs down by signing up for only a single streaming service, Netflix is a great choice. Similarly, if you are looking for a service to form the basis of a larger streaming service collection, Netflix fills that role nicely. At roughly 54% household penetration, Netflix is used by both pay-TV subscribers and cord-cutters alike.

Netflix is really leaning into their original content these days. This is great because many of them are excellent, but it also comes at the expense of a slowly diminishing movie and TV series library.

Hulu



Price: \$5.99/month (with commercials); \$11.99/ month (no commercials)

Free Trial: [Hulu offers users a one-time 7-day free trial](#)

Subscription Term: Month to month

Content: Hulu's library focuses primarily on television, although there is also a modest assortment of movies available on the site. Where Hulu is trying to corner the market is in regard to recently-aired TV shows. Rather than waiting months or, in some cases, a year for the latest episodes of your favorite show to hit Netflix or Amazon, Hulu offers it the next day. Next day availability is where they've carved out their niche among the streaming video giants.

Verdict: If you want to keep up with current seasons of your favorite shows and watch them on-demand, Hulu is a great option worth considering. Especially when you consider most pay-TV subscribers are watching their content from the DVR rather than live. With Hulu you just have practice a little patience by waiting until the next day to watch your show, rather than the night it aired.

Hulu Summary

Amazon Prime Video



Over the past few years, Amazon has transitioned Prime Video from a digital video marketplace to a full-blown streaming service. Amazon Prime Video is an interesting option for cord-cutters for both its price, the amount of content, and (when paired with a full Amazon Prime subscription) its loads of extra benefits.

The service has traditionally been linked to an annual Amazon Prime subscription (which also give users access to free two-day shipping, Amazon Music, unlimited photo storage, a Kindle lending library, and a lot more). While full-fledged Amazon Prime subscribers still have access to the video service, as of April 2016 Amazon has also started to offer it as a standalone monthly subscription.

Price: \$8.99/month for Amazon Prime Video alone; \$10.99/month for Prime Video along with the rest of the Amazon Prime subscription benefits for Sprint wireless customers; \$99/annually for a year of full Amazon Prime

Free Trial: Amazon offers users a one-time 30-day free trial of Amazon Prime

Subscription Term: Available month to month or as part of an annual Amazon Prime subscription

Content: Amazon offers a large library of free streaming movies, TV series, documentaries, and musical content as a part of its Amazon Prime Video service. One of the strongest components of the Amazon Prime Video library is the wide array of children's programming. While other players on this list have their share of commercial-free, on-demand children's content, Amazon has really committed to the genre with a variety of quality, educational, and wholesome material for the little cord-cutters in your household. Additionally, Amazon has followed in the footsteps of Netflix and Hulu by offering original TV series and movies.

Verdict: Amazon is a modern corporate juggernaut. You will be hard-pressed to find a more robust package of retail services and media content than what you get with an annual Amazon Prime subscription.

Prime Video used to be just a small component of that package thrown in as a fringe benefit; but as evidenced by the way Amazon has chosen to break out the service with its own stand-alone subscription option, the company is making a hard run at industry-leading Netflix. Their commitment to original content was rewarded when "Manchester by the Sea" won for Best Actor and Best Original Screenplay at the 2017 Oscars.

Amazon Prime Video Summary

Subscribing to Individual Networks

Some of the top networks even have their own streaming services now. The two big ones to point out are CBS and HBO. CBS is consistently the top-rated broadcast network.

HBO Now



Price: \$15 a month

Free Trial: HBO Now offers users a one-time 1-month free trial

Subscription Term: Month to month

Content: HBO Now offers a fairly robust collection of movies and television programs (including the entire catalog of HBO's popular original content). New episodes of popular shows like *Game of Thrones* are available to stream on the service typically within a few hours of their original broadcast.

Verdict: HBO Now is ultimately a niche service for those who have come to enjoy keeping up with HBO's lineup of original content. The movies and many of the back catalog television episodes available on HBO Now can be found on other services. Be warned, the delay between live airings of new episodes and their streaming availability could mean you miss out on live-Tweeting the latest bombshells in the *Game of Thrones* zeitgeist!

CBS All Access



Price: [\\$5.99/month \(limited commercials\)](#); [\\$9.99/month \(no commercials\)](#)

Free Trial: 7-day free trial

Subscription Term: Month to month

Content: CBS All Access features original programming, like the brand new *Star Trek Discovery* series premiering this summer, alongside the latest CBS shows and an expansive back catalog of broadcast favorites. Local broadcasts are also available to stream (150+ markets), and that includes NFL games.

Verdict: While nearly every CBS show is available to watch via Hulu, CBS All Access is the only way to watch the current season of your favorite CBS shows. In fact, you'll have access to the most current CBS shows 1-day after the original air date. If you're not comfortable waiting to watch CBS shows or you don't have a DVR set up to record the latest broadcasts, CBS All Access is a pretty attractive service at just \$5.99 per month.

The Future of Stream TV

As time goes on, more and more networks are likely to follow the path of HBO, Showtime, and Starz and develop streaming services to try and remain afloat amid declining cable subscriptions.

As with all streaming options, take advantage of free trials to not only explore available content on each service, but pay close attention to things like quality and compatibility with your streaming devices of choice.

Another important thing to do is develop a way to keep track of when these services charge you each month. Not having a large cable bill is great, but if you forget to cancel free trials or fail to ditch a service you're unhappy with before the auto-renew date, you'll be stuck paying for a month of content you didn't want (sound familiar?).

[Continue to part 5](#)