

Streaming Media in 2016

Getting Started:

It's easy! Netflix is a great place to start!

Quick Questions:

Can I cancel cable and still get sports and ESPN? Options for this have greatly increased, but are still limited.

How fast does my Internet need to be to stream media? Media can be streamed at almost any bandwidth, but the faster your Internet is, the clearer your video and sound will be, and less "loading" screens you will see. At a minimum, you want 1.5 Megabits per second. You'll probably want to aim for closer to 5 Megabits per second to get HD video.

Hardware

Computers:

Most streaming services work through your web browser (subscription rates may apply).

Pros: Bookmarks?

Cons: Uncomfortable surroundings, tied to computer performance

Mobile Devices:

Most streaming services work through free apps (subscription rates may apply)

Pros: Very mobile

Cons: Small screen, battery and data use

Smart TVs:

Most streaming services work through pre-installed apps (subscription rates may apply).

Pros: Simple, integrated interface

Cons: Not always flexible regarding future services, requires research because of cost.

Streaming Devices (ROKU, AppleTV, Nexus Player):

Most streaming services work through a huge selection of free apps (subscription rates may apply).

Pros: Flexible, always up to date, easy interface

Cons: Requires a hardware purchase.

Casting Devices (ChromeCast, AppleTV)

A "casting device" is a term used to describe a piece of hardware that takes the screen from one device (example: Phone) and transmits it to another device (example: TV).

Pros: Allows you to cheaply access content that may otherwise be unavailable to your TV (like HOOPLA, home movies, or websites).

Cons: Many people regard these devices to be clunky and not very user friendly.

Streaming Services

Streaming Services are your content providers. There's a lot available now, some are free, but the high quality providers all have subscription costs. Examples include: Netflix, Amazon Prime, HULU, Sling Television, HBO, Showtime, StarzPlay, Crackle, etc.

Netflix:

Cost: \$7.99 per month for basic, \$9.99 for Standard, and \$11.99 a month for Premium.

Netflix remains the gold standard for Streaming Media services. They have over 10,000 movies and over 5,000 television shows available, and that number is from 2012. Netflix also develops a lot of its own programming, such as Orange is the New Black, House of Cards, and Daredevil.

Amazon Prime:

Cost: \$99 a year*

*Paying the yearly subscription cost to Amazon Prime allows you to use a service similar to Netflix, but also offers free 2 day shipping on many items purchased from Amazon. Amazon also develops its own content similar to Netflix. Amazon also allows you to subscribe to some premium cable channels like Starz.

HULU:

Cost: \$7.99 a month (with commercials) or \$11.99 a month (commercial free)

Hulu has access to a lot of recently aired programming that other streaming services have to wait to get. The catch is that its selection is much smaller, and it misses out on a lot of exclusive content Amazon or Netflix might get.

Sling Television

Cost: \$20 a month

Sling Television is meant to mimic a basic cable package. It offers about 20 channels at the base cost of \$20 a month, and this includes both ESPN and ESPN 2. They offer additional channel packages for \$5 extra month, if you want MORE channels or MORE sports.

Premium Cable Channels (HBO, Starz, Showtime, and more).

Cost: \$8.99 a month (Starz) - \$10.99 a month (Showtime) - \$15.99 a month (HBO)

We used to beg for these channels to be available al a carte... Now they are!

Free Channels (Crackle, History Channel, Chiller, FrightPix, etc)

Cost: Free

These channels tend to be limited in scope, but can still offer value if they fall within your interests. There seems to be a ton of free channels dedicated to cheap horror movies, but there are also gems out there like Crackle.