

Review: Chromecast streams media at a nice price

July 31 2013, by Ron Harris



Google's Chromecast, a small device that works wirelessly to stream video and music to a high-definition TV, is displayed on Wednesday, July 31, 2013, in Atlanta. The Chromecast is controlled by a smartphone or tablet computer and lets the user connect and view content from services like YouTube and Netflix via Wi-Fi. (AP Photo/Jaime Henry-White)

A new device from Google makes it easy to stream video from several popular services to a high-definition TV. Chromecast is tiny enough to dangle from a keychain when not in use, but it packs a big punch for a

low price.

At merely \$35, Chromecast is irresistible. Using your home Wi-Fi network, it streams some of your favorite shows from some of your favorite services, including Netflix and Google's YouTube. It takes only a few minutes to set up, and the device worked flawlessly.

Chromecast joins Roku, Apple TV and several other devices meant to project Internet content onto TVs. In the early days of online video, people were content watching movies and shows on their desktop or [laptop computers](#). But as these services become more popular and even replace cable TV in some households, there's a greater desire to get them playing on [television sets](#), which tend to be the largest screens in living rooms.

That's especially true when your computer is a phone or tablet and has a smaller screen.

Chromecast, which is about the size of a thumb drive, plugs directly into the HDMI port of an HDTV. A USB cable must be inserted at the other end of the Chromecast and connected to a [power source](#), either a wall outlet or a USB port on the TV.

It was easy to sync Chromecast with my Android phone, and it was an even nicer experience with Google's new Nexus 7 tablet. There's something to be said for turning my touch-screen device into a remote control for Netflix.

I watched an episode of Netflix's original series "House of Cards" in high definition without a [glitch](#). Same goes for watching the BBC's "Empire of the Sun," a free offering from Google's online Play store. But other titles there cost money, as does a Netflix subscription. Chromecast is merely a physical conduit to the services I'd already

signed up and paid for.



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Even though I already have a Netflix app on my [smartphone](#), I had to download a Chromecast version of it, as well as the main Chromecast app from Google. That's a one-time affair, and it's a snap to get them up and running after the initial installation.

To watch a movie, I simply choose it from the Chromecast Netflix app. Once it's playing on the big screen, I was able to easily pause, play and forward through my content with a swipe of the finger. "House of

Cards" continues to play even after I power off my phone completely, as the video passes through my Wi-Fi network, which remains on. I do have to turn my phone back on to regain remote control over the viewing experience.

It works similarly with Chromecast app for Google Play and YouTube.

More apps are coming. For Hulu Plus, HBO Go and other services without apps yet, it's possible to simply stream that content on Google's Chrome Web browser, assuming you have accounts with them. You can then have whatever is showing on the browser project onto the TV.

In practice, though, I was never able to successfully connect a desktop or a laptop computer, each running the latest version of the Chrome browser, to the Chromecast device. There are apps and browser extensions and not-fully supported operating systems that all need to be in sync to pull it off. In my tests, using two different Macs and a Windows computer, they never were.

Also, Chromecast doesn't allow so-called "sideloaded" content to be streamed on it. "Sideloaded" is essentially shorthand for content that Google can't be certain you have legally purchased and have the rights to consume. If I had gotten the Chrome browser method to work, I could have used that to view them on the big screen. But it's easier said than done.

Plenty of devices allow much easier local content streaming. Chromecast isn't one of them. It's not a deal-breaker for me, though.



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I suspect many people already have devices that can stream these popular services to an HD display. If you have an Xbox 360 or a PlayStation 3, you're already good to go. The same goes for the Roku streaming box that handles some of the same streaming apps as Chromecast, and many more. Heck, even a laptop with an HDMI output can deliver the content to an HDTV.

Unlike many of the other streaming devices, you still need a phone, tablet or regular computer to control your viewing with Chromecast. Roku's streaming box, for instance, lets you sign into accounts, choose content and rewind video with an included remote. Roku does make a

separate streaming stick, similar to Chromecast, but that works only with TVs that have a technology known as mobile high-definition links, or MHL.

For now, there are only a handful of apps currently available to use with Chromecast. But they are among the most popular Internet video services. Video from Apple's iTunes isn't likely to come to Chromecast any time soon, but you can expect many more to be added if the device takes off. (If you really need iTunes, you'll need an Apple TV. Roku doesn't have it, either.)

At \$35, Chromecast is cheaper than other streaming devices, which run about \$100 each. I can think of a lot of worse ways to fork over \$35.

If you don't already have a device that can stream Netflix to your HDTV, Chromecast hits the sweet spot.

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