

Hulu.com lets you legally watch premium video content

February 27 2009, By Craig Crossman

Most of us don't watch television the way we did just a few short years ago. Back then, we had to watch TV shows when they were aired, a slave to the broadcasting schedule whim of the networks.

The introduction of the affordable VCR heralded the beginning of scheduling choice. We could record programs to be viewed at some future time of our choosing. Of course those recordings could only be made based on network broadcasting schedules. Time-shifting DVRs like the TiVo debuted, making network recording even easier. With them you could record more than one show simultaneously and even pause and rewind live TV. Still though, you remained a slave to that broadcasting schedule.

Now there are video on-demand services being offered by content providers like DirecTV and cable companies that let you select from a growing library of movies and TV shows you can record whenever you want. Television schedules most likely will never go away but at least there are ways being offered that let you view and even record premium television content on your own schedule.

I recently missed a show that I tried to record because unknown to me at the time, the president's news conference went longer than expected and everything got shifted by a half-hour. My DVR recorded part of the news event and chopped off the end of the show I wanted to record. Other times it has rained and my recorded shows got pixilated beyond recognition.

There are countless reasons why something doesn't get recorded properly but fortunately we can now go online to see many of the shows we missed.

While it's getting easier to access recent movies online, recent TV show episodes are difficult to find online beyond the networks' Web sites. A new Web site is making great strides in providing on-demand, premium television programming and it's all legal. Hulu.com is able to bring a whole lot of premium television programming, movies and archived classics because although the Web site is an independently operated entity, NBC Universal and News Corp are equal equity partners in the venture. Through their efforts and collaboration with other networks and movie production companies that wish to have their content made available online, it looks like Hulu is making some real headway in the online premium video venture.

According to Hulu, the company currently has more than 130 content providers with which they have partnered including FOX, NBC Universal, MGM, Sony Pictures Television, Warner Bros. and more.

Many of the networks provide some of their shows on their own Web sites, but Hulu is a great place to start looking for what you want because it aggregates a lot of shows from a wide variety of sources. When you go to Hulu's home page, you can simply search for the show you want by its name or its category, such as Science Fiction, Home and Garden or Comedy.

I recently missed an episode of "Medium" and was able to see the new episode the day after it aired on television. Before, the only way I could see the missed show was to hope that it re-aired later. I know there are many peer-to-peer sharing services out there like BitTorrent, where you can download recently aired shows, but those are illegal and the video quality of the files can be pretty bad.

Hulu makes its content available for free; however, there's usually a short commercial inserted at each break. It's a small price to pay for excellent video quality and video on demand at no charge. Hulu requires no special software to see the content, other than a modern Web browser, and it works on Windows and Macintosh computers. Future versions are planned to work on mobile devices.

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