

Comcast to debut cable shows online by year's end

October 20 2009, By DEBORAH YAO , AP Business Writer



In this photo released by HBO, from left, Kevin Connolly, Kevin Dillon, Adrian Grenier and Jerry Ferrara, appear in a scene from the HBO series "Entourage." You'll be able to watch popular cable television series such as "Entourage" and AMC's "Mad Men" on your computers by the end of the year _ as long as you're a Comcast Corp. subscriber watching at home. (AP Photo/HBO)

(AP) -- You'll be able to watch popular cable television series such as HBO's "Entourage" and AMC's "Mad Men" on your computers by the end of the year without paying extra - as long as you're a Comcast Corp. subscriber watching at home.

Comcast will be the first cable [TV operator](#) to unlock online access to a slate of valuable cable shows and movies, aiming to replicate what's available on television through video on demand.

Time Warner Cable Inc. and others plan to follow as the pay-TV companies look to satisfy growing consumer appetite for online video while preserving subscription revenue.

Access will be carefully guarded: [Comcast](#) subscribers can initially watch shows and movies only on their home computers after being verified by the [cable system](#). And for now, the online viewing will be restricted to those who also get Internet service through Comcast, not through competitors like phone companies.

Comcast, wanting to make sure the shows will remain off-limits to non-subscribers, still is working on providing access over competing home broadband systems as well as on the go - at work, on laptops and, one day, over cell phones.

At a briefing at Comcast's Philadelphia headquarters this week, executives said cable networks such as HBO will decide how much to put online. Some will include the current season's episodes only, while others could include archives of past seasons.

The offerings expand on what cable networks now make available online. Broadcast networks have been running full episodes of many shows for free on sites like Hulu, but cable networks have typically resisted. AMC's Web site, for instance, has the season premiere of "Mad Men" in its entirety but only video summaries of subsequent episodes.

Comcast's national rollout of "On Demand Online" - the company promises to replace that with a hipper, more contemporary moniker - comes months after the cable operator announced partnerships with 24 cable TV networks and broadcasters.

The company's talks for a controlling stake in NBC Universal, which owns a third of rival site Hulu.com, is not expected to affect its online

video aspirations.

Similar plans are in the works at other pay-TV operators, including Time Warner Cable Inc., Verizon Communications Inc. and DirecTV Group Inc.

Viewers can access the cable shows and movies through Comcast-owned Comcast.net and Fancast.com and eventually on the Web site of cable networks such as AMC, which is owned by Cablevision Systems Corp. After users log in, the cable system will perform such checks as whether a Comcast cable modem is being used.

Comcast has no plans to offer an online-only subscription for cable channels, a move that could cannibalize its own cable TV offerings. However, it will expand ways in which viewers can rent and buy shows and movies through an integrated store on Fancast.com.

Premium cable channels that currently don't have any commercials, such as those from Time Warner Inc.'s HBO, CBS Corp.'s Showtime and Liberty Media Corp.'s Starz, will not have any ads online, either in the video or on the Web page. Ad-supported networks have typically shown ads online as well.

Comcast executives said the company plans to generate revenue by adding more and different types of ads on the sites. But the company's goal is not necessarily to profit from it but to keep subscribers happy enough so they don't cut the cord or defect to a competitor.

Comcast declined to comment about any type of revenue-sharing arrangements with cable networks. But it said current contracts give them digital rights to content.

Google Inc. has struggled to make YouTube profitable and Hulu.com, a

popular free online video site, has been losing money as well.

In May, NBC CEO Jeff Zucker said Hulu will be profitable soon. Hulu is owned by General Electric Co.'s NBC Universal, News Corp., The Walt Disney Co. and Providence Equity Partners.

©2009 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.

Citation: Comcast to debut cable shows online by year's end (2009, October 20) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-10-comcast-debut-cable-online-year.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--