

# Survey of viewers shows extent of TV time shifting

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In this publicity image released by HBO, Joe Manganiello, left, and Anna Paquin are shown in a scene from "True Blood." (AP Photo/HBO, John P. Johnson)

(AP) -- If you've never time-shifted a prime-time television series - watched it later on a DVR, over the Internet or ordered it on demand - you're now in the minority.

A survey of viewers conducted on the eve of the new fall season quantifies what has become commonplace in millions of American homes: People are putting themselves in charge of their own TV schedule.

Sixty-two percent of viewers across the country interviewed in a poll conducted for the nation's largest [cable company](#), [Comcast Corp.](#), said they have used time-shifting technology. Six in 10 people said they owned a [digital video recorder](#).

Among the new majority is Bethany Hardy, 36, of Arlington, Va., a writer and mother of a 3-year-old. She said she and her husband rarely watch [live television](#).

"It's a generational thing," she said. "All of my friends are pretty much the same way."

Hardy said it's usually between 9 p.m. and 10 p.m., after the toddler has been put to bed and she's cleaned the house a little, that she has time to think about catching up on "Mad Men," "Curb Your Enthusiasm," "True Blood" or some of her other favorites.

"If I didn't have the DVR, I don't think TV would be in the running," she said. "I would probably be doing more surfing on the Internet or reading books. I just don't have the time to figure out what shows are on at what time."

It's the same thing in Amarillo, Texas, when Bryan Barcroft gets his 7-, 5- and 3-year-old children to sleep. He follows "Big Brother," "NCIS" and other shows on DVR. They tape "America's Got Talent" and watch each week's two episodes back-to-back with the kids, zipping through the commercials.

"We could live without it, but we wouldn't be interested in watching television, and that's our main form of entertainment," said Barcroft, a 35-year-old information technology specialist at a bank.

Diana Kerekes, Comcast's vice president of video services, said people at the company are struck by how rapidly the new technology has been adopted. That's evident in both the survey's findings and Comcast's internal data of how the company's products are used. "It's huge," she said.

The survey found that 60 percent of viewers report time-shifting more than they did a year ago. Going back three years, 84 percent said they are doing it more often - more than half of the people saying they use it "significantly more."

"The people who are doing this are not young kids who wear black and live in SoHo," said Alan Wurtzel, chief researcher for NBC Universal. "They are mainstream."

Consider HBO's experience this season: "Entourage" averages 1.78 million viewers for the live Sunday-night debut of each week's episode. Another 1.87 million people watch a playback on DVR, 1.66 million order it later in the week on demand, and 2.3 million watch during other times it is shown on the network.

Four of five people said they'd be watching some programs live this fall, Comcast's survey said. But 41 percent said they'd also be watching some shows on DVR, 17 percent said they'd see some online and 16 percent said they'd order programming on demand.

The upward trajectory of DVR ownership has been well chronicled, but fewer people are aware of how quickly on demand viewership is catching on, Kerekes said. Comcast, which has 23.2 million customers,

gets some 350 million orders of VOD programming a month, she said. Television shows now surpass movies, music video and children's programming, she said.

One heartening sign for networks could be that time-shifting will make many customers apt to try something new. Kim Cooper, an online support specialist from Charleston, S.C., said that's one thing on her mind when she sits down on a Sunday and programs each of her two DVRs for the week.

"If you see something coming up you'll say, 'Do you want to give it a shot?'" Barcroft said. "We decide in the first five or 10 minutes whether we like it or not."

Most of the networks offer programming for on demand usage, although frequently not until the day after it appears on TV, Kerekes said. Comcast offered some 1,700 items for on demand viewing during an average month in 2004; now it's more than 17,000 a month.

It's a similar story at Time Warner Cable Inc., which averaged 1,400 on demand offerings a month in 2005 and now has more than 12,000 each month. In three years, there's been an 800 percent increase in use of a Time Warner feature that allows viewers to start at the beginning of a program no matter what time they tune in.

Going forward, it will be important for networks to understand the different experiences for customers watching a show as it's placed on the TV schedule, online or on demand, she said. HBO creatively offered "extras" on demand leading up to "The Pacific" miniseries, including a Tom Hanks interview, and that helped drive viewers to the show's premiere on the TV network.

Comcast's random survey of 1,000 people - not just Comcast customers

- was conducted online between July 22-28 by International Communications Research. Its margin of error was plus or minus 3.1 percent.

The networks are finding a lot more people like Deb Holcomb, 42, of San Francisco, who is using different ways to piece together her TV experience. She doesn't have cable or satellite, or a DVR, and gets about 20 stations for free over the air with a digital signal.

"When I just have to watch something on ESPN, I go to a nearby bar," she said. "The pizza and beer are still less than a monthly cable bill. If it's a series on HBO, I rent it at the video store. If it's not a network show, I might be able to stream it from the website when it's convenient to watch.

"Those options provide me with as much flexibility as cable and a DVR for a lot less money," she said. "If none of those options are available, it probably wasn't good enough to bother watching anyhow."

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