

Beyond Netflix: where else to get your flick fix

July 14 2011, By BARBARA ORTUTAY , AP Technology Writer



In this July 20, 2010 file photo, a Netflix customer looks for a movie on Netflix in Palo Alto, Calif. Netflix has provoked the ire of some of its 23 million subscribers by raising its prices by as much as 60 percent for those who want to rent DVDs by mail and watch video on the Internet. New subscribers will have to pay the new prices immediately. The changes take effect Sept. 1, 2011, for Netflix's current customers.(AP Photo/Paul Sakuma, file)

Even with a fee hike, millions of Netflix subscribers will be spending less each month than what it costs two adults to watch a single movie in a theater.

Yet the company, which is usually well-liked, managed to irk many of its 23 million U.S. customers by raising what it charges for streaming movies and TV shows over the Internet and sending DVDs by mail. The increase is as high as 60 percent.

For the disgruntled bunch, or those looking to expand their media-consumption horizons, there are a growing number of options for watching movies and TV shows online, on DVDs or through cable TV's on-demand services.

The right option for you will depend on your appetite for video. Do you want the latest movies or the greatest classics? Would you prefer cheap or better on-the-go access? How many movies do you watch each month?

If that red DVD envelope from Netflix has been gathering dust, unopened, since "Jersey Shore" premiered in 2009, it might be time to ditch that DVD plan.

Of the online options, Netflix has the most content available for streaming over the Internet, though cable TV providers have pay-per-view options with a better selection of recent movies. Apple and Amazon, meanwhile, let you rent a la carte if you don't want to commit to a monthly plan but want the latest movies.

What's clear: New rates take effect immediately for new customers and on Sept. 1 for existing ones.

[Netflix Inc.](#) split the options for streaming and DVDs by mail. It is charging \$16 combined for streaming and one DVD at a time, a 60 percent increase from \$10 under the old package. Smaller fee increases are coming for Netflix more expensive plans, which offer more DVDs.

A plan that offers only online streaming remains unchanged at \$8 per month. That may be all you need, but the selections are more limited than the DVD plans.

So have a seat. Grab some popcorn. Consider these video consumption

options.

- Amazon's Instant Video

Amazon.com Inc.'s service offers thousands of movies and episodes of TV shows for online rental. Rental prices range from \$1 to \$5. There is no Netflix-like monthly subscription plan, so this option is best for customers looking for an a la carte plan that lets them pick what they want to watch. Customers get video for one to seven days once they begin watching.

Amazon is offering free movie streaming to shoppers who pay \$79 a year for a Prime membership, which offers free two-day shipping and discounts on next-day shipping. The selection, though, is much smaller than Netflix's. Amazon offers roughly 6,000 movies and TV shows for streaming over an Internet connection for its Prime [subscribers](#). By contrast, Netflix offers more than 20,000.

Customers can stream movies and shows on computers or on TV sets using a compatible, Internet-connected device such as Blu-ray players and set-top boxes from the likes of Sony, Panasonic, TiVo or Logitech.

- Apple iTunes

Renting movies through Apple Inc.'s iTunes is another pay-per-view option to access the latest dramas, comedies or TV shows. Customers can rent regular or high-definition flicks and watch them on iPhones, iPads, computers or TV sets using Apple TV set-top boxes.

Apple lets people rent first-run, high-definition movies the day they come out on DVD for \$5 each, though most movies cost \$3 or \$4. TV shows are generally \$1. You can watch rentals for a day or two from when you start playing them.

As with Amazon, renting movies through [Apple](#) is a good option for people who want the latest releases as soon as possible. There are thousands of movies available, though iTunes doesn't have as many obscure, indie flicks as Netflix's streaming library. If you watch just a few shows or movies a month, it might be a cheaper option.

- Redbox

Redbox, a unit of Coinstar Inc., has more than 27,000 bright-red DVD kiosks in grocery stores, drugstores and elsewhere around the U.S. Customers can rent DVDs for \$1 per night. Blu-ray movies are available for \$1.50 per night.

Depending on how many movies you watch, this could be a cheaper option than Netflix, but the options are more limited. Each kiosk holds 200 newly-released titles, which are updated every Tuesday.

Through concessions with Hollywood studios, Redbox has agreed to delay renting titles from Universal, Warner Bros. and Fox until nearly a month after the DVD versions go on sale. Netflix's DVD plan has similar restrictions.

With its budget-conscious, family-friendly approach, Redbox is a good option for hurried families looking to pick up a movie on the way home from the grocery store.

-Blockbuster

Under the new ownership of Dish Network Corp., Blockbuster shifted to per-day pricing recently to better compete against Redbox and others. Just-released movies were lowered to \$3 for the first day. Other newer movies are \$2 for the first day. Additional days are \$1. These prices apply to DVD rentals as well as movies rented online.

Blockbuster offers no monthly streaming plan. Its DVD-by-mail subscriptions are pricier than Netflix's - \$12 a month for one movie or video game at a time or \$17 for unlimited two-at-a-time rentals. Netflix's DVD-only plan is \$8 per month for one and \$12 for two.

You can still return discs to any of Blockbuster's 1,700 remaining stores, if you have one nearby, and exchange them for new ones.

You can also download Blockbuster movies to your compatible PC, tablet or smartphone. The company says movies available for download are often available long before they are at Netflix.

Blockbuster makes sense for those who live near its stores and prefer DVDs to streaming.

- Cable

For those who don't want to cancel their cable service, cable TV providers such as Comcast and Time Warner offer on-demand options to their monthly subscribers.

Time Warner charges \$5 for a new movie release and \$2 for older movies. Other cable TV companies have similar pricing. Movies are sometimes free as part of a subscription to HBO or other premium channels.

Of course, you need monthly cable service. The average cost of Comcast Inc.'s basic package is about \$60 for TV service, about 100 digital channels, music channels, video on demand and XfinityTV.com. Time Warner Cable Inc.'s average monthly package also runs about \$60 and gives access to more than 100 channels.

Comcast gets movies often on the same day they are available on DVD

and says many of its indie films are available as soon as they come out in theaters. That makes it an option for customers who can pony up a bigger monthly subscription fee and value seeing recently released films. Being a subscriber also gives you access to its offerings online and on the iPad and iPhone.

Time Warner Cable has a catalog of about 10,000 movies. It also gets movies the same day they come out on DVD, giving it more recent content than Netflix streaming. Time Warner Cable also has an iPad app and you can watch its content inside your home, though not at coffee shops or other public places with Wi-Fi.

- Hulu and Hulu Plus

Parent companies including The Walt Disney Co., News Corp. and Comcast Corp. are looking to sell the online video service, but that hasn't stopped it from offering thousands of TV show episodes and movies to its viewers.

Besides a free option, Hulu Plus subscribers can pay \$8 per month for more content, high-definition viewing and access on the iPad and newer-model iPhones, as well as video game consoles and high-end TV sets from Samsung, Sony or others.

Hulu's content skews more toward [TV shows](#) than movies, though both are available. It's a good option for those looking to watch shows such as the "Daily Show," "Family Guy" or "The Office."

Both Hulu and Hulu Plus show advertisements, though on Hulu Plus there are [movies](#) available without commercial interruption.

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Citation: Beyond Netflix: where else to get your flick fix (2011, July 14) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-07-netflix-flick.html>

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