

TiVo refreshes lineup with 6-tuner Roamio DVRs (Update)

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This image provided by TiVo Inc. shows a TiVo Roamio DVR, one of the companies new digital video recorders. TiVo Inc. announced a new line of digital video recorders Tuesday, Aug. 20, 2013, to give television viewers more control over what they watch on traditional channels and over the Internet. (AP Photo/TiVo Inc.)

TiVo Inc. wants to give television viewers more control over what they

watch on traditional channels and over the Internet as the pioneer of digital video recorders unveils its fifth-generation devices.

The new devices face more competition than TiVos did when they debuted in 1999. Cable and satellite TV companies are improving their own DVR offerings, while stand-alone devices such as Roku, Apple TV and Google's Chromecast seek to simplify Internet streaming on big-screen TVs. Meanwhile, game consoles and smartphones now come with apps to do much of what TiVo does. An Internet startup called Aereo offers an Internet-based DVR for broadcast channels.

With its new Roamio DVR, TiVo is counting on the notion that avid television viewers prefer one device to do it all.

"What TiVo is doing here is pressing home their advantage. That is, they know TV," said Colin Dixon, chief analyst at nScreen Media, a research firm in Sunnyvale, California. "What they are doing here is actually very difficult for anybody else."

Dixon said many casual television viewers will be fine with generic offerings from their cable company, but TiVo's appeal is with high-end consumers who are already paying the most for television packages and Internet video services.

The Roamio went on sale Tuesday and marks the company's first major update in three years.

Like previous TiVos and other DVRs, the Roamio supports basic functions such as the ability to pause and rewind live TV. TiVos also let you watch video from Netflix, Hulu and other Internet services on regular TVs, as long as you have subscriptions with them.

The new TiVos give you more options for finding shows to watch. The

emphasis in the past was on finding programs to record, whether by title, actor, director, genre or keyword. The Roamio offers recommendations on what's currently on, based in part of what other TiVo viewers are watching and have watched in that time slot in the past. The new devices also let you narrow what you see in channel-by-channel listings to just movies, sports or kids shows.

Some of the new DVRs will also come with the ability to watch live and recorded shows on iPhones and iPads. Before, a \$130 device called TiVo Stream was needed. Streaming is initially limited to devices on the home Wi-Fi network. This fall, out-of-home viewing will be available through other Wi-Fi networks, such as at work, hotels and coffee shops. An Android app also is coming by early next year.

The mid-range Roamio model comes with enough storage for 150 hours of high-definition television and can record up to six channels at once. Besides built-in streaming, there's built-in Wi-Fi support to negate the need for TiVo's \$90 adapter.

TiVo is touting the \$220 savings as it tries to persuade people to spend \$400 for that mid-range model, the Roamio Plus. It's an investment that also requires a \$15-a-month TiVo service for electronic television listings and other features. A high-end Roamio Pro, which can store 450 hours of HD programming, is available for \$600.

The \$200 base model has 75 hours of storage and can record just four channels at once. It also lacks built-in support for streaming to iPhones and iPads. But the base model can record over-the-air broadcasts, while the pricier models require a TV signal from a cable service. (Satellite TV isn't supported on any of the devices. AT&T'S U-verse won't work either, but Verizon's FiOS will.)

TiVo, which is based in San Jose, California, has been steadily gaining

subscribers over the past two years, after seeing its business decline amid competition from DVRs provided by cable and satellite companies. TiVo now partners with many of those companies, including Comcast Corp., to provide a premium DVR offering. It also sells stand-alone DVRs, such as the current Premiere line.

TiVo had 3.4 million subscribers as of April 30, a nearly 75 percent increase from 2 million two years earlier.

Gartner analyst Mike McGuire said the new TiVos will appeal to people who want to find shows easily, whether they come from a traditional channel or from an Internet service. Although cheaper rival devices are available, McGuire said some consumers will be drawn by TiVo's simplicity—especially if they are already paying for premium cable packages in multiple rooms.

The Roamio expands TiVo's push into multi-room experiences. You can buy a TiVo Mini for \$100 upfront and \$6 in monthly service fees to extend the functionality of the main TiVo into another room. Two family members can watch separate shows even though all the recordings are coming through the main TiVo. Although that capability was available before, the Roamio offers under-the-hood improvements in allocating resources.

Jim Denney, TiVo's vice president for product marketing, acknowledged growing competition from other television-viewing devices and services.

But in offering both traditional channels and Internet video, as well as features such as viewing away from home, the Roamio "should be the best TV experience you can get. . It's your content wherever you want."

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