

Slingbox lets you watch live TV at home or elsewhere

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Man's second-best friend, television, gets out of the house more than ever. On a smartphone app or laptop, people watch sports on WatchESPN, movies and original programming on HBO Go or Netflix, and weekly network TV series.

It's still rare, though, to watch on a mobile app or Web browser, live, any channel or recorded program available at home on a cable box or satellite receiver.

Sling Media, for a decade, has treated television like a mocha latte at the local coffee shop: for here or to go? It streams everything, DVR included, to your mobile device anywhere in the world.

The Slingbox M1 is Sling's latest and, at \$149.99, least expensive box. It's \$30 less than the box it succeeds, the Slingbox 350, with the same features and the what-took-so-long addition of built-in Wi-Fi. For nonsatellite subscribers suffering from Hopper envy, this is the same technology in Dish Network's DVR - both Dish and Sling are owned by Echostar.

The M1 connects to a home network, or directly to a router, and then with a series of five cables - three for component video and two for audio - to a cable box. Yes, it's cable-intensive. There's no HDMI, likely because it carries encrypted signals.

It's not a big deal, even for video hounds, because of the negligible

differences in picture quality, whether on a smartphone, tablet or HDTV. Yes, the M1 can stream from a mobile device to a television through an Apple TV or Roku box, though the bigger the television the less hi-def the picture looks.

The M1 - slightly bulkier than a cake-mix box - performs best with a strong Wi-Fi signal but also works with a mobile device's LTE (beware of data charges).

The M1's bit-rate adapts to the available bandwidth, which guarantees the best-possible picture depending on the circumstances.

My home network delivered close to 2,500 kilobits per second, sufficient for excellent picture clarity and stability. My work's pipeline, 3,000-plus kbps, produced HD-like video on my monitor using the SlingPlayer Desktop software.

But the data rate over my iPhone's lowly 3G service, which the Sling's app showed as only 230 kbps, resulted in sputtering and freezes. Elsewhere, the signal improved but Wi-Fi is best.

In the home, the M1 can replace a television, and extra cable box, in the bedroom, where you can watch Jimmy Fallon's monologue on an iPad using the Sling app. The otherwise excellent app is an annoyance for its price, \$14.99. That's per device. It makes the M1's price seem artificially low, like a printer's. I'd rather pay more, maybe \$175, for the M1 if it included an unlimited, gratis app. The SlingPlayer Desktop software is free. This means you can have all your cable programming available any time on your desktop.

The M1 communicates with a cable box through a built-in infrared emitter and also comes with an external emitter if the two boxes are not within range. It also monopolizes the cable box. If you're watching a

Fallon monologue in bed and restless daughter Kate turns on the television in the other room, it's Fallon redux.

Sling technology is particularly appealing to the traveler and, specifically, the out-of-town sports fan.

On a recent vacation, I sat around a kitchen table with family and relatives, each noodling with an iPad. While others checked in on amusing animals on YouTube, I dialed in that night's Red Sox game - streamed from my cable box at home and received, quite clearly, over our host's Wi-Fi network. This is the stuff of family moments.

With the NFL here, the M1 can guarantee you'll never miss your home team's game (or local news), no matter where you are. The Dish Network can do that too. Cable companies have tippy-toed into TV Everywhere, with all-you-can-watch available only over your own [home network](#).

That makes Sling, and the M1, still relevant. It's a one-way ticket home for the frequent traveler and on-the-go television lover.

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SLINGBOX M1 STREAMING DEVICE

Price: \$149.99

Good: The lowest-priced Slingbox, with built-in Wi-Fi, for streaming all cable or satellite TV programming to your [mobile devices](#).

Not so good: Inexpensive for a Slingbox, expensive for a streamer. Monopolizes cable box. Expensive app, priced per device.

Information: sling.com

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