

Review: Can you really save money by cutting the cord?

March 18 2015, by Anick Jesdanun



This Tuesday, March 17, 2015 photo shows a coaxial cable in Philadelphia. TV cord-cutting is for those who are willing to give up conveniences they now enjoy. (AP Photo/Matt Rourke)

There are more ways to watch television online than ever. Even HBO and ESPN—two channels often cited as reasons people keep expensive cable or satellite TV packages—will be available for streaming on their own. All these offerings make it possible to drop your pay-TV service without giving up favorite shows.

But no single streaming service offers everything. And you still need to pay for your Internet connection, typically at a higher price when unbundled from your TV service. Depending on how and what you watch, cutting the cord won't necessarily save you money.

Here are things to consider:

WHAT CHANNELS DO YOU WATCH?

Sony's new PlayStation Vue service, launched Wednesday in New York, Chicago and Philadelphia, offers more than 50 broadcast and [cable channels](#) starting at \$50 a month. Additional sports channels are available for a \$10 or \$20 more. HBO and ESPN aren't included.

PlayStation Vue comes on the heels of Dish's \$20-a-month Sling TV service. Sling TV has fewer channels and no over-the-air networks, but it has ESPN and ESPN2. Other ESPN channels are available for \$5 more.

The Wall Street Journal, meanwhile, reports that Apple is developing its own package of about 25 channels, including ABC, CBS and Fox, set to be available in the fall and potentially priced at \$30 to \$40 a month. (Apple won't comment.)

In a few weeks, HBO will debut a stand-alone service, HBO Now, on Apple TVs, iPhones and iPads for \$15 a month. Cablevision also will offer HBO Now to its Internet-only customers, including those with Android, Windows and Mac devices, for an undisclosed price.

SPORTS

Until recently, it's been difficult to get live sports without a TV subscription. Major League Baseball's Internet service blocks hometown teams and requires a pay-TV password for national games such as the World Series, for example.



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Now, both Sling TV and PlayStation Vue offer basketball games through TBS and TNT. PlayStation also offers Golf Channel, CBS, Fox and NBC, as well as regional sports networks, including Comcast SportsNet for Chicago and Philadelphia teams and Yes for New York Yankees and Brooklyn Nets games (sorry, Mets and Knicks fans). You need Sling TV for ESPN.

For both services, you'll pay a combined \$95 a month for the higher sports tiers.

LIVE OR BINGE-WATCH?

If you like to watch network shows right away, you generally need an antenna to get over-the-air networks. CBS's \$6-a-month All-Access service offers live TV only in 14 markets. ABC, NBC and Fox offer free live streaming in some markets, but only linked to a pay-TV password. Although Hulu offers many shows the next day, Fox and ABC shows are delayed a week online without a pay-TV password (or, for ABC only, an \$8-a-month Plus subscription). Hulu gets some cable shows the next day, but you'll more likely need iTunes or Amazon at \$2 or \$3 an episode.

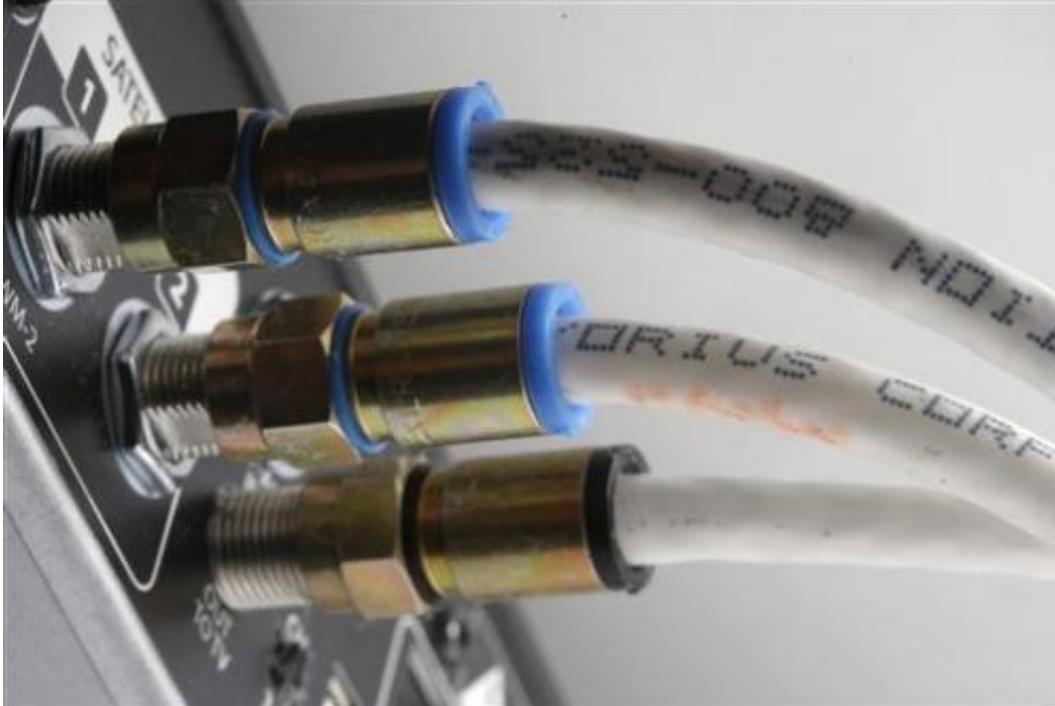
But now you can watch many shows live on PlayStation Vue or Sling TV and pick up HBO separately. HBO's app offers new episodes as they are available on TV. Showtime also is expected to offer a stand-alone service this year.

If you like to binge-watch entire seasons over a few weekends, online streaming is ideal. Netflix and Amazon have extensive catalogues. Unless you're drawn to their own original shows, you likely need just one—Netflix for \$9 a month or Amazon Prime for \$99 a year (\$8.25 a month).

EQUIPMENT

An Internet speed of at least 5 megabits per second is recommended, but you'll need a faster connection for better video quality or for multiple

streams in a household.



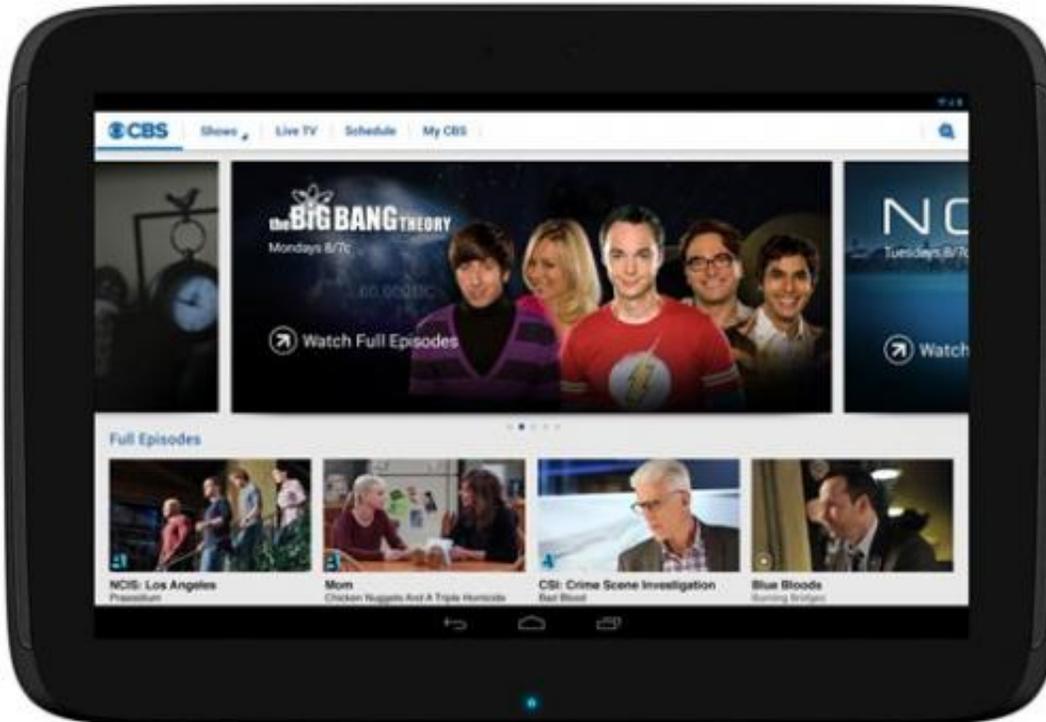
In this Tuesday, March 17, 2015 photo, cables are connected to a satellite television box in Philadelphia. TV cord-cutting is for those who are willing to give up conveniences they now enjoy. (AP Photo/Matt Rourke)

You'll need a smart TV with the right apps included or a streaming device such as Roku, Apple TV, Xbox or PlayStation. Many services are offered on traditional computers, phones and tablets, too. The most restrictive is the new Sony service; you'll need a PlayStation 3 or 4, even after Sony releases an iPad app.

WHAT'S MISSING?

You'll need to pick and choose multiple services if you want to replicate your cable or satellite package. Even then there will be gaps. Most major cable channels are available through either PlayStation Vue or Sling TV, but you won't get obscure ones—such as foreign channels.

Another shortcoming: Only PlayStation offers recording capabilities. Storage is unlimited, but shows can be kept for no more than 28 days. That said, all services offer many of the shows on-demand automatically, without any need to set up recording. Which shows are available and for how long will vary.



This file product image provided by CBS Interactive shows the CBS All-Access app. CBS All-Access is a digital subscription video on demand and live streaming service for the CBS Television Network, currently available in 14 markets. (AP Photo/CBS Interactive)

ARE YOU READY?

Sony's PlayStation comes closest to replicating the pay-TV bundle, but it's also the most expensive. If you stay current on your TV shows and watch many channels, especially sports, going the online route won't save you money. In fact, it might be more expensive because your cable provider will likely increase the price of Internet access when unbundled from TV.



In this Jan. 5, 2015 file photo, Roger Lynch, CEO of Sling TV, far right, demonstrates Sling TV, a live television streaming service, at the Dish Network's news conference at the International CES. Sling TV is aimed at people who have dropped their cable or satellite packages or never had either. (AP Photo/Jae C. Hong, File)

Prices vary greatly. Time Warner Cable, for instance, charges \$58 for Internet once promotions end. Add \$95 for all your sports channels online and \$15 for HBO, and you'll probably pay more than you already do. Add the cost of Netflix or Amazon to your calculations, too—but only if you don't already subscribe.

If you really only watch a few channels, or you don't care about watching shows late, cord cutting could be just right for you.

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