

New Comcast online video service for its Internet customers (Update)

July 13 2015, by Tali Arbel

Comcast, the country's largest cable company, is offering its own online video alternative as people spend fewer hours watching live TV and more time using tablets and phones for entertainment.

The new service, called Stream, will be available to Comcast's Internet customers and cost \$15 a month. For now, it will include only broadcast networks like FOX and NBC in addition to HBO, but no cable channels like AMC or TNT.

Anyone can watch broadcast networks for free on a TV with an antenna, which costs about \$20 and up. And HBO already sells a stand-alone streaming service for \$15 a month.

Comcast has ambitions to offer more TV online, however. It wants to add cable channels over the next year so that online TV subscribers have "access to any of the content we have available" for traditional cable customers by the end of March in 2016, said Marcien Jenckes, Comcast Cable's executive vice president for consumer services. Prices will be similar to traditional cable, he said.

Comcast's service, which is only for its customers, follows the launch earlier this year of Dish Network's nationwide Internet TV service, Sling TV, which sells for \$20 a month and includes cable channels like ESPN, AMC and Food Network. You can also add on HBO. A slew of Internet TV options have come in the past year as many cable and TV companies think younger customers prefer to watch TV online, without paying for a

full bundle that can easily top \$70 a month.

The ability to smother competitors' online TV services was a major reason why regulators were concerned about Comcast's bid to buy Time Warner Cable. It would have created a TV and Internet behemoth that would serve more than half of the country's high-speed Internet customers, as calculated by the government.

The deal never went through. Comcast dropped its bid in April.

Comcast Corp., which is based in Philadelphia, said Monday that it will launch the service in Boston at the end of the summer, followed by Chicago and Seattle. It plans to make it available to all its Internet service customers by early 2016. Jenckes declined to say how many customers Comcast hoped to win online.

Comcast had more than 22 million Internet customers at the end of the first quarter.

The Stream service has limitations. You can watch live TV at home but there are rights restrictions for a lot of live content if you want to watch on your phone outside your home network.

It will work on computers, tablets and phones but won't work directly on TVs. Instead, users can log in to HBO's app and other channel apps through TV-connected gadgets like an Apple TV or Roku, for example.

Stream does come with a DVR service that can store 20 hours of video.

Many young people like sharing passwords for online TV accounts with their friends. Stream allows only two streams on separate devices at the same time.

Like with Dish's Sling TV, Stream customers could sign up online and disconnect the service at any time. A major complaint about cable service is contracts that are difficult to escape and having to drop off set-top boxes and other equipment after canceling service.

At a Glance: Internet TV options

How other providers stack up against Comcast's new streaming video service

COMCAST

Monthly price: \$15.

Live offering: A dozen networks, including HBO.

On demand: Yes.

Restrictions: Internet customers only.

AMAZON

Monthly price: \$8.25 (only through \$99-a-year Amazon Prime subscription)

Live offering: None

On demand: Apart from original shows such as "Transparent," offerings tend to be past seasons, plus movies. Next-day access to shows for \$2 or \$3 an episode.

Restrictions: Not available directly on Apple TV. Prime requires one-year commitment.

CBS ALL-ACCESS

Monthly price: \$6.

Live offering: More than 90 markets.

On demand: Day-after access to shows on mobile devices (on traditional computers, it's free without a subscription). Full seasons for many shows, not just past five episodes. Past seasons for a handful of shows, including "The Good Wife," "Survivor," "The Amazing Race" and "60 Minutes."

Restrictions: No apps for streaming TV devices. Some sports blackouts.

DISH'S SLING TV

Monthly price: Starts at \$20.

Live offering: About 20 channels, including ESPN, ABC Family, AMC and Food Network. No broadcast channels like CBS or NBC. Add-on packages for sports, movies, kids, lifestyles and world news available for \$5 each, and HBO for \$15.

On demand: No recording of channels, though some offer older episodes, including HBO. Access to WatchESPN on-demand app, with others coming.

Restrictions: Can watch only one stream at a time, so members of households will need multiple subscriptions, although HBO content can

be streamed on 3 devices at a time. DVR controls, such as pause and rewind, aren't available for many channels. NFL blackouts on mobile devices.

HBO NOW

Monthly price: About \$15

Live offering: New episodes are available through apps about the same time they are shown on TV.

On demand: Current and past seasons of most HBO shows, including "Games of Thrones," "Girls" and "The Sopranos." Hundreds of movies, including those from Universal, Fox, Warner Bros. and Summit.

Restrictions: Can subscribe only through a partner. Apple has exclusive deal among non-traditional distributors and requires Apple TV, an iPhone or iPad to sign up (you can then watch through a browser on other devices). Cablevision is the only pay-TV provider so far to offer HBO Now.

HULU

Monthly price: \$8 for Plus, though many shows are free on Windows and Mac computers.

Live offering: None

On demand: Next-day access to shows from ABC, NBC, Fox and CW,

along with some cable channels. Some movies and original shows.

Restrictions: Fox and CW shows restricted to pay-TV subscribers for first week. ABC requires pay-TV or Hulu Plus subscription during that time. Plus also needed for viewing on mobile and streaming TV devices.

ITUNES

Monthly price: None

Live offering: None, except for special events such as iTunes music festival.

On demand: Next-day access to shows for \$2 or \$3 an episode.

Restrictions: No Android devices. Apple TV is only streaming device supported.

MLB.TV

Monthly price: \$20 (or \$110 for full season)

Live offering: All Major League Baseball games, subject to hometown blackouts.

On demand: All games.

Restrictions: Lots of blackouts. Extra \$5 a month or \$20 for season to watch on mobile and streaming TV devices. Separate package available

for minor-league games.

NETFLIX

Monthly price: Starts at \$8.99

Live offering: None

On demand: Apart from original shows such as "House of Cards," offerings tend to be past seasons, plus movies.

Restrictions: Ultra high-definition (4k) streaming for \$3 more, standard-definition only for \$1 less.

NICKELODEON'S NOGGIN

Monthly price: \$6

Live offering: None

On demand: Games and activities created for service alongside archives of shows no longer on any of Nickelodeon's TV channels. Aimed at preschoolers.

Restrictions: Available on Apple mobile devices only at first.

SONY'S PLAYSTATION VUE

Monthly price: Starts at \$50.

Live offering: Base plan with CBS, NBC and Fox broadcast channels and cable schannels from AMC, Discovery, Fox, NBCUniversal, Scripps, Turner and Viacom. Additional sports and other channels for \$10 or \$20 more. More than 50 channels in basic; more than 85 in all.

Main omissions: CW network and Disney channels, including ESPN and ABC.

On demand: Recording capabilities with unlimited storage, though shows expire after 28 days. Many shows over the past three days are automatically available. Access to some channels' on-demand apps.

Restrictions: Available in New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, San Francisco and Los Angeles only. Up to three simultaneous streams in a home, but each must have a separate PlayStation 3 or 4, and only one can be PS4. Some content is available on an iPad app for out-of-home viewing, but a PlayStation is still required for set-up.

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