

The differences between the new online cable bundles

January 12 2016, by Tali Arbel



This Sept. 29, 2014, file photo, shows the Amazon Fire TV, a product for streaming popular video services, apps and games in high-definition, in Decatur, Ga. Moving the traditional cable bundle online, stripped down to fewer channels and freed from ugly cable boxes, is all the rage these days. Sony's PlayStation Vue started nearly a year ago. For the Vue, you need a PlayStation or Amazon Fire TV gadgets and have to live in one of seven big cities. (AP Photo/Ron Harris, File)

Traditional cable providers are launching TV packages that don't require cable boxes—good for you because you save on monthly equipment fees

and don't need a technician to come install it for you.

But there are also drawbacks. Some services are easy to add and cancel, like Netflix is. Time Warner Cable required a phone call for both. Apart from Sling, leaving your home cuts off access to a lot of video. As with traditional cable service, sometimes there are unexpected fees that end up on your bill.

A breakdown of what's good and what's not:

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DISH'S SLING TV

What you get: About 20 cable channels, including ESPN, ABC Family, AMC and Food Network. Over-the-air channels like ABC, CBS, Fox and NBC are not available; Univision is for an additional fee. You can only watch one stream at a time, so it's not for families.

Benefits: It's the best deal for live TV, with a slim package of some of the most popular cable channels. The same shows are available at home as when you're away.

Drawbacks: There have been quality issues with streaming. You can't record shows. There are some on-demand episodes, but you can't skip commercials for most, and it's hard to figure out where the on-demand episodes are. Sling announced at CES last week that it will improve that by March.



This June 11, 2013, file photo, shows the Comcast Corp. logo during The Cable Show 2013 convention in Washington. In the fall of 2015, the cable giant started rolling out a cable service that streams live TV in customers' homes without the need for a cable box. (AP Photo/Susan Walsh, File)

You don't get access to apps created by channels except for WatchESPN. A family with multiple TVs would probably want more than one subscription. (If you add HBO, you get three streams for that channel only.)

Where it's available: Nationwide.

Price per month: Starts at \$20, plus taxes where required. Adding HBO costs \$15, and add-on packages of channels with themes like sports, movies, kids and world news are \$5 each.

SONY VUE

What you get: Major broadcast networks and popular cable channels. Those owned by Disney, including ABC and ESPN, will be added at an unspecified date, and CW isn't available. You can watch up to three

simultaneous streams in a home.

Benefits: You can record shows so you can fast-forward through commercials, but they expire after 28 days, with no ability to archive them, as you can with traditional DVRs.

Drawbacks: You need a PlayStation or Amazon's Fire TV device to sign up. Price is comparable to regular cable.

Where it's available: Chicago, Dallas, Los Angeles, Miami, New York, Philadelphia and the San Francisco Bay Area.

Price per month: Three tiers. The cheapest is \$50 a month for about 50 channels, including AMC, CNN, ESPN, Fox and NBC. Tops out at \$65 for 85 channels. Pricier bundles have more sports options. Showtime is another \$11, and a few others are available on an a la carte basis.

COMCAST STREAM

What you get: Local networks, HBO and the ability to watch two simultaneous streams.

Benefits: An Internet-based DVR with 20 hours of storage that lets you fast-forward commercials and watch outside the home.

Drawbacks: Live TV works only on phones, tablets and computers in your house. For the TV, you need an antenna for live channels, though you get channel apps like HBO Go and Fox Now for on-demand video if you have a streaming gadget like Roku, Apple TV or Xbox.

Where it's available: Boston and Chicago markets for Comcast's existing

Internet customers. The company plans for expand to other regions and create more channel options.

Price per month: \$15, plus taxes and fees, which can add up to an additional \$4.

TIME WARNER CABLE'S ROKU APP (WITH NO CABLE BOX)

What you get: Different tiers of service that mirror cable offerings: Local networks and a bundle with popular [cable channels](#). Five simultaneous streams.

Benefits: You get TV and most popular streaming video services through a free (for now) Roku 3 box, which is easy to use. Channels are high-definition quality.

Drawbacks: With taxes and fees, a service advertised at \$10 cost me more than \$13. You need a phone call to sign up and cancel. Channels took about three seconds to load.

Where it's available: New York City; Mt. Vernon, New York; New Jersey for people who also pay for Time Warner Cable. There's no timeline beyond that.

Price per month: \$10 for over-the-air channels, \$20 if you add Showtime and Starz, \$50 to also add several dozen cable networks including AMC, Disney, ESPN, Fox News and TNT. These are promotional prices that will rise. Local taxes and fees are additional.

Charter Communications has been pitching a streaming service to its Internet customers in markets including St. Louis and Madison, Wisconsin. The company wouldn't provide details, but according to its ads, the service comes with a free Roku. Local networks plus HBO or Showtime cost \$13 a month, before taxes and fees; adding 16 cable networks brought it to \$20 a month.

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