

Binge watching on Netflix no longer requires internet access (Update)

November 30 2016, by Michael Liedtke



In this Friday, Jan. 17, 2014, file photo, a person displays Netflix on a tablet in North Andover, Mass. Netflix subscribers can now download shows and movies to watch later when they're not online, like during a flight or car. The download option was added to phone and tablet apps Wednesday, Nov. 30, 2016. (AP Photo/Elise Amendola, File)

Netflix subscribers can now binge on many of their favorite shows and

movies even when they don't have an internet connection.

The long-awaited offline option announced Wednesday gives Netflix's 87 million subscribers offline access to videos for the first time in the streaming service's decade-long history.

Netflix is matching a downloading feature that one of its biggest rivals, Amazon.com, has been offering to its video subscribers for the past year. It's something that also has been available on YouTube's popular video site, though a subscription is required in the U.S. and other countries where the site sells its "Red" premium service.

The new feature puts Netflix a step ahead of two other major rivals. Offline options aren't available on HBO's internet-only package, HBO Now, or Hulu, although that service has publicly said it hopes to introduce a downloading feature.

Netflix subscribers wishing to download a video on their smartphone or tablet need to update the app on their Apple or Android device.

Not all of the selections in Netflix's video library can be downloaded, although several of the service's most popular shows, including "Orange Is The New Black," "House of Cards," and "Stranger Things," are now available to watch offline.

Downloadable movies include "Spotlight," this year's Oscar winner for best film. Notably missing from the downloadable menu are movies and TV shows made by Walt Disney Co. Those still require an internet connection to watch on Netflix.

The Los Gatos, California, company is promising to continue to adding more titles to its offline roster.

Netflix CEO Reed Hastings had long resisted calls for an offline-viewing option, much to the frustration of customers who wanted flexibility to use their subscriptions to watch a show or movie when traveling on a train, plane or car where internet connections are spotty or completely unavailable.

Earlier this year, Hastings finally indicated he might relent and introduce downloading.

The change of heart coincided with Netflix's expansion into more than 130 countries, including many areas with shoddy or expensive internet connections that make the ability to watch video offline even more appealing.

Netflix ended September with 39 million subscribers outside of the U.S.

The offline option may accelerate the decline of Netflix's steadily shrinking DVD-by-mail service, which offers the ability to watch video without an internet connection. Netflix's DVD side still has one distinct advantage—access to recent theatrical releases before they are available for streaming.

Netflix's DVD service ended September with 4.3 million subscribers, a decrease of nearly 10 million customers during the past five years.

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