

DirecTV Now wins, YouTube TV loses in channel battle

October 4 2017, by Jennifer Van Grove, San Diego Union-Tribune

Would-be cord-cutters weighing their options often ask me: Which digital bundle should I get instead of cable?

The answer, of course, depends on your channel preferences. Right now, I'm really digging YouTube TV, Google's \$35-per-month streaming TV package. Beyond having all four major broadcast networks, which is nice for live sports and awards shows, YouTube TV is actually fun to use. It's as if one of the smartest internet companies in the world decided to rethink the entire TV experience for the digital age, modernizing everything from search and guides to recommendations.

Oh wait, that's exactly what happened.

But before you, too, make the leap to YouTube TV, you should know this: The vast majority of consumers won't like it - at least based on presumed channel demands.

TiVo, which has an in-house data science team, used its quarterly video trends survey to ask people interested in customizing their own bundles - or 78 percent of all respondents - to pick the networks that they would include in their a la carte packages. The company then compared those selections against the skinny bundle lineups offered by the streaming services.

It is, perhaps, one of the fairest ways to evaluate the efficacy of any of the options out there.

It turns out that DirecTV Now's "Just Right" package, which costs \$50 a month and includes regional sports networks, is most aligned with consumer demand, matching 85 percent of respondents' core channel choices. The AT&T-owned provider's most affordable bundle, "Live a Little" (\$35 a month), placed second. I'm not surprised. I've always said that DirecTV Now is the most cable-like of the streaming alternatives.

YouTube TV's lineup, by contrast, is least representative of demand, according to TiVo. Channel selection is diverse and sports-friendly, with BBC, Bravo, E! and CBS Sports Network. However, the internet video company's bundle overlaps with just 37 percent of respondents' preferred channels.

So what are the most in-demand channels for a la carte packages? The top 20, as determined by TiVo's survey are: ABC, CBS, FOX, Discovery Channel, NBC, History, FX, A&E, TNT, TBS, HBO, AMC, Food Network, USA Network, ESPN, PBS, Syfy, Comedy Central, Lifetime and Animal Planet.

Sounds about right. And, to be fair, if these are the channels you have to have, then YouTube TV definitely gets a failing grade. No Turner stations means no TBS, TNT or Food Network, for instance, and that could be a deal breaker for some.

But I suspect YouTube TV is really geared toward millennials and cord-nevers, folks who may not have such rigid [channel](#) demands and who tend to default to subscription video on-demand - or SVOD, in industry parlance - products such as Netflix or Hulu for many of their TV needs. Nearly two-thirds of survey respondents, or 64 percent, use SVOD services. What's more, about 95 percent of the group use these products every day.

Oh, and here's another nugget worth keeping in mind: More than 85

percent of people surveyed by TiVo who don't have cable or satellite TV service said that price was a determining factor in their decision to cancel. I take that to mean that cord-cutters are extremely price conscious, which also means they might be more willing to sacrifice a few desired networks in favor of a better deal.

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Citation: DirecTV Now wins, YouTube TV loses in channel battle (2017, October 4) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2017-10-directv-youtube-tv-channel.html>

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