

Is cutting the cord part of your New Year's Resolution? Here's what you need to know

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Perhaps your New Year's resolution goes like this: Stop sending hundreds of dollars monthly to cable and satellite companies in 2019. Cut the cord and save.

It makes sense, as there is so much entertainment available via online streaming services such as Netflix and Amazon Prime that can be viewed on smart TVs or via a streaming device that connects to your (nonsmart) TV.

And if there are [cable](#) or [broadcast channels](#) you don't want to give up, step right up! There are services available there as well. Several firms (including YouTube TV, DirecTV and Hulu) offer lower-priced cable alternatives with fewer [channel](#) selections but more generous watching possibilities than cable.

You won't be alone in cutting the cord. Some 33 million people will ditch their cable or satellite subscription in 2018, according to researcher eMarketer, up from 24.9 million in 2017.

So where to start? Read on:

Antenna

In most of the country, you don't need cable to bring in the broadcast TV networks and local channels. In many instances, an antenna, like the kind of we used to use back in the rabbit ears days, will do just fine, and it

will bring in many additional digital channels that specialize in old TV shows or foreign language fare.

(If you're in a hilly, rural area the antenna may not cut it.)

Antennas have gotten stronger over the years, and many come with a preamp that boosts the signal. We recently tried the basic \$19.99 model, from Amazon's house brand, and it more than did the job, bringing in channels clearly and quickly. Amazon says the "Ultra Thin Indoor TV Antenna" has a 35-mile range. We also reviewed a pricier \$79.99 Mohu Leaf Glide this year, which promises double the range. After trying both products, we'd go for the cheaper one. We didn't really see any difference with the more expensive model.

Obviously, if you don't care about broadcast and local channels, you don't even need the antenna. Just connect your TV to the internet either via a smart TV or via a streaming player.

Streaming devices

If you'd like to see the best of online entertainment, you'll need either a "smart" TV, which has services such as Netflix and Amazon built in, or an accessory streaming player, which connects to the HDMI port of your TV and your Wi-Fi to bring the apps to your TV. While most TVs are now "smart," many older models aren't. Amazon said that the Amazon Fire TV Streaming Stick was its best-selling product of 2018 among members of the Prime expedited shipping and entertainment [service](#), while Parks Associates says Roku has the largest market share. Both sell in the \$25 range. Apple also has a streaming unit available, Apple TV, selling for \$149.

Entertainment services

Netflix is the big kahuna of online entertainment, with nearly 150 million subscribers. The company has been on a tear, spending billions to sign name-brand Hollywood producers such as Shonda Rhimes and Ryan Murphy to make shows for Netflix. In recent months, Netflix has beamed a stage production from Bruce Springsteen, a new series with Michael Douglas and Alan Arkin and a foreign film, "Roma," that critics say is destined for Oscar.

Just using your internet signal to bring in Netflix (which starts at \$7.99 monthly) should keep you busy for days, if not weeks. There's also Amazon Prime Video, which brought us the Emmy-winning "Marvelous Mrs. Maisel" and "Homecoming" with Julia Roberts.) Meanwhile, for 2019, the Walt Disney Co. is yanking movie titles from Netflix and launching a new service, Disney +, that will feature new versions of "Star Wars," "Monsters, Inc." and "High School Musical." Apple is also expected to launch its new, unnamed entertainment service in 2019. New series from Steven Spielberg, Oprah Winfrey and Reese Witherspoon and Jennifer Aniston are set to debut with Apple. The company, according to analysts, plans to give the service free to users of Apple products such as Apple TV and the iPhone.

Cable Alternatives

YouTube TV, Hulu, DirecTV, Sling and Sony all offer full-featured cable TV alternatives that you pick up via their apps. Sling is the least expensive, at \$25 but has the fewest channels available—including two big omissions, CBS and ABC. A new player, Philo, is even cheaper at \$16 and has even fewer channels—it's missing the broadcast channels, but it's pitched at those who don't care about sports, hence the lower fee.

To get all the broadcast networks and many of the cable ones you love, look to spend \$40 monthly with YouTube TV or DirecTV Now.

With the cable alternatives, you get the ability to watch on your TV, computer, phone or tablet; start a show on one device, and finish it elsewhere. All offer some form of DVR service, which automatically records shows once you request it and lets you play it back later, usually without commercials.

But here's where costly cable DVR service (which requires equipment rentals) does a better job. You tape the show, it's yours. You can now fast-forward through the commercials as you please.

On these services, sometimes that works; others times, a network might slip in a video-on-demand version instead that prevents fast forwarding.

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