

There's more than one way to connect

May 28 2013, by Salvador Rodriguez

It's not enough these days to wonder what to watch on your TV; a growing question for many is how to watch. Just like any device in your life, TVs can now connect to the Internet. This lets you grab shows from the Internet and watch content whenever you want. Most new TVs come with the ability to connect to the Internet, but there are a number of ways to easily turn an existing TV into a so-called smart TV. Here's a primer.

The simplest way to do so is to connect a TV to a laptop or computer using either a VGA or [HDMI cable](#). In most cases, this will give users either a second screen for their computer or it will mirror what they see on their machines. From there they can play digital content they own or they can visit websites with video such as Netflix, Hulu, [YouTube](#) and [HBO GO](#). Of course, using a computer as a TV involves a lot of work by the user, who has to move the mouse and type out each website to go to. This is why digital media receivers exist.

The two most popular right now are the Roku 3 and the [Apple TV](#) (both for \$99). Users can easily connect these small devices to their TVs using HDMI cables, and they can connect to the Internet either through Wi-Fi or by using ethernet cables. Once users have their device set up, they can log into all their accounts and begin [streaming content](#). Both Roku and [Apple TV](#) have access to a variety of similar channels, including Netflix, Hulu and the NBA, NHL and MLB. However, there are [pros and cons](#) to each device.

For Apple one big advantage is that it has a YouTube channel, which Roku does not. Apple fans can also use AirPlay, a feature that lets them

easily send content from their Apple devices and computers to Apple TV. Using this feature, users can quickly find content on their phone and send it to their TV or they can give a presentation on their [iPad](#) that is then shown on a TV's big screen. Apple users also have access to the company's large catalog of content from [iTunes](#).

For Roku there are a variety of advantages, including that it has hundreds of more channels than Apple does. The most important among those channels are Amazon Instant Video and HBO GO. Apple users can use AirPlay for HBO GO, but they cannot access it through a channel the way Roku users can. Apple users also don't have any access to Amazon, which has a large collection of watchable content that can be purchased or rented.

The Roku 3 also has a motion-sensor control that can be used for some games, notably Angry Birds. And for users who don't want to buy the Roku 3, they can also get cheaper versions of the device that come with some limitations.

For both the Roku and Apple TV, people can use the remotes that come with the digital receivers or they can use their smartphones as the controls. To do this, both the receiver and the smartphone must be connected to the same Wi-Fi network. Other companies sell digital receivers, including those that have built devices that use Google's software, but Roku and Apple are the most popular by far.

However, many users can turn their TVs into "smart" TVs by using the game consoles that they might already own. Besides playing games the Xbox 360 and the PlayStation 3 can both be used to stream digital content from the Internet by connecting to Wi-Fi or with an ethernet cable. Once that's done, users can watch content from Netflix, Hulu and other channels. Although using an Xbox or PS3 may not be as simple or seamless as using a device like the Apple TV or Roku, it's an alternative

and for many people, especially those with teenagers, it's a way to do so without having to buy another product.

For those who want a true smart TV, most new TVs come with some sort of smart TV setup. These features typically allow apps to run on TVs, ranging from obvious services like Netflix, Hulu and Pandora to others such as Facebook and Twitter. Sports fans might also enjoy fantasy sports apps, so they can watch games while they track how their fantasy teams are doing.

But for now, and this may soon change, many TVs with smart features don't run quickly enough and are frustrating to use. That's because [smart TV](#) apps typically load slowly and there is usually a delay between the time a button is hit on the remote and when the TV reacts to the command on the screen.

I recommend the Apple TV or Roku 3 for those who want to turn their TVs into Internet-connected machines and want the best experience - with quick loading, in-depth TV menus and a smooth interface. But viewers will need to pay for a few subscriptions: For Netflix and [Hulu](#), it's \$7.99 per month for each service. The good thing is the subscription allows access to the content from all of their devices. They can also pay for other devices or pay to rent movies.

My personal setup includes both the Apple TV and Roku 3. I connect the two using Wi-Fi, and I pay for Netflix each month. I don't pay for cable, so for new shows such as "Mad Men" I buy the season pass from Amazon and I can watch each episode as it comes out. I also have an antenna so I can watch local NFL games in the fall. When I want to watch my own [digital content](#), I simply stream it through the Apple TV using AirPlay.

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