

Review: Plenty of options for HBO online, not enough time

April 22 2015, by Anick Jesdanun



In this March 9, 2015 file photo, Richard Plepler, CEO of HBO, talks about HBO Now for Apple TV during an Apple event in San Francisco. Like HBO Go, the app that cable and satellite TV subscribers have, HBO Now gives you instant access to new TV episodes and movies, along with programs from months and years ago. You don't need a cable TV package to watch hit shows such as "Game of Thrones" and "Girls." (AP Photo/Eric Risberg, File)

HBO Now, the cable channel's new stand-alone streaming service, is

both a blessing and a curse.

Like HBO Go, the app that cable and satellite TV subscribers have, HBO Now gives you instant access to new TV episodes and movies, along with programs from months and years ago. People who don't subscribe to cable TV are now able to watch hit shows such as "Game of Thrones" and "Girls" without "borrowing" parents' accounts or turning to piracy sites.

The curse? Having more video than you can ever find time to watch.

I spent a weekend catching up on "Game of Thrones" in time for the April 12 season premiere. Then I squandered a day off from work bingeing on the startup parody "Silicon Valley." Now on my list: shows that ended years ago, including "Six Feet Under."

And don't get me started on movies. HBO gets many Hollywood hits that never make it to Netflix streaming. Plus, it makes its own movies, including recent documentaries on Frank Sinatra and Scientology.

Here's your guide:

HOW TO WATCH

You can watch new episodes online at the same time they are shown on TV, just as you can with HBO Go. You get all past episodes of HBO shows and an extensive library of original movies. Theatrical movies come and go.

For now, HBO Now requires you to have an Apple TV, iPhone or iPad or be a Cablevision Internet subscriber to sign up. It costs \$15 a month

and is available only in the U.S.

You can watch on the Apple gadgets or personal computers, but not yet on Android or streaming TV devices besides the \$69 Apple TV. HBO Now should be available on more devices once an exclusivity deal with Apple expires this summer.

BENEFITS

As with HBO Go, new TV episodes appear on demand immediately—and you can skip ahead to find out the ending before TV viewers.

It's cheaper than paying for a cable TV package. You can drop HBO Now when your month is up.

BUT YOU STILL MIGHT WANT HBO THE REGULAR WAY ...

If you're already paying for a cable or satellite TV package, you're probably better off getting HBO as part of that rather than signing up for HBO Now on your own. That will give you a lineup of traditional channels, including HBO, HBO2, HBO Family and HBO Latino. More importantly, you might be able to negotiate a discount as part of a package. But it can be difficult to drop HBO once it's in a package, so HBO Now is better for short-term subscriptions.

OTHER WAYS TO WATCH HBO ONLINE

— HBO is \$15 a month if you subscribe to Dish's \$20-a-month online Sling TV service. You get the main HBO channel and video on demand, but not the full library yet. For example, only two of the 94 "Sex and the City" episodes are available. Dish says it's working to fix that, but it might take a few weeks.

— Amazon also makes HBO shows available for free to members of its \$99-a-year Prime service. However, these tend to be older shows such as "The Sopranos" and some include only a few seasons. For the rest, you can buy episodes or seasons for download, but you have to wait months after they appear on TV.

— You can also buy shows through iTunes, Google Play and other services.

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REPLICATING THE TV EXPERIENCE

Buy a streaming TV device. With HBO Now, you can watch on an Apple TV. With HBO Go, Sling TV and Amazon, your options include the \$100 Roku 3 and the \$39 Amazon Fire TV Stick. The Xbox and PlayStation game consoles also have streaming capabilities. Otherwise, you're stuck with a personal computer, phone or tablet.

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RESTRICTIONS

Not every service is going to work on every device. Comcast subscribers can't watch HBO Go on Amazon's Fire TV, for instance, but Fire TV owners can get HBO through Sling TV. There are also blackouts due to rights issues. That happened with some overnight boxing programs on

Sling TV this week.

These services typically give you three streams at once, meant for use within the same household.

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Online:

HBO Now: hbonow.com

Sling TV: sling.com

Amazon's HBO collection: amzn.to/1Dzc4Zf

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