

Crossing the Digital Divide (v48)

“TV OD”

By Joseph Feigon for the Observer

Streaming services are finally starting to replace cable as the go-to destination for hot shows, but broadcast TV still has one major advantage over its online counterpart: live television. The fact is, watching the latest news, sports or hit shows as soon as they're broadcast can be difficult without a paid TV subscription. However, it's not impossible. If you want to watch live TV online, you have more than a dozen options, depending on what you want to watch. Read on to find live TV on your computer, mobile device or set-top box.

Stand-Alone Network Subscriptions

When streaming video first started to take off, analysts and fans alike predicted that someday, viewers would be able to simply purchase channels à la carte over the Internet. This hasn't happened across the board yet, but companies are slowly working toward it, with both broadcast networks and premium channels offering stand-alone subscriptions.

CBS All-Access is one of the only major networks to go completely streaming, with access to both live TV and recorded programs. The service is still relatively new, but CBS is putting a lot of faith in the program, including a promise to broadcast the upcoming Star Trek series exclusively on All Access. Other networks will likely follow suit in the near future. Premium channels have actually been quicker to adopt this strategy than their network counterparts. HBO Now, Showtime and Starz offer both live and recorded versions of the TV channels.

For those who want something on a smaller level, lots of local news programs on broadcast networks (like Fox 5 News at 11 in New York City, for example) play for free online. Simply visit your local affiliate's website, find the news section and see if it offers a live stream. It probably does, although many of them function only on computers, rather than mobile devices or set-top boxes.

Sports

Live sporting events are generally preferred to recorded games. Luckily, most sports are easy to stream live. Almost every major sports organization in the United States has its own streaming service, from MLB.tv (\$130 per season) to NBA League Pass (\$100 per season) to NFL Live (\$100/season).

Signing up for a streaming sports service is as simple as visiting your preferred sport league's website and clicking on the Streaming or Watch Online section. Prices tend to vary, depending on how many games you want to watch and how many teams you want to follow, but you can expect to spend about \$100 per year. You can even watch some big games, such as the SuperBowl, for free.

There is, however, one big caveat: Due to licensing agreements, the streaming services cannot show games covered by your local stations. You'll need to stick with an HD antenna (and possibly one of the rebroadcasting devices) for that.

Bottom Line

Netflix and Amazon remain the primary Internet destinations for watching movies. On-demand video has certainly matured. Live content is the next frontier, given the current, best way to watch live TV online is — ironically — to have an existing cable or satellite subscription. Slowly but surely, though, cord cutters are gaining access to real-time channels in addition to pre-recorded content. Live TV could be the next big frontier for streaming video, but until then, watching shows as they happen requires a little dedication and creativity.

Control those things you can, and keep the surprises to a minimum!

Portions of this article first appeared in Tom's Guide, and was written by Marshall Honorof)