

COMPUTER GURU

By Don Benjamin

Is It Time to Cut the Cable?

Last Fall, I penned (typed) an article about YouTube, which brings you a world of videos, from thought-provoking (*Intelligence Squared* discussions) to informative (PBS *NewsHour*) to joyful (Gorilla Babies), and everything in between.

YouTube is called a “streaming service,” because you watch the video as it’s delivered (streamed) via the internet from YouTube’s servers to your computer (or tablet or “smart” TV). You can select exactly which video to watch when you want to watch it. And it’s free.

Now, we’ve been cable TV subscribers for 35 years, and our collection of TV gear includes a digital video recorder (DVR) and three set-top boxes around the house that offer 315 channels, of which we watch four. (I used to watch the Dryer Channel—especially calming after a long day at the Technology Lab.)

We also pay Verizon for internet and phone service—a so-called a “triple-play” package—all for \$225/month. Last year, we subscribed to Netflix and HBO-Now, both premium streaming services that aren’t part of our Verizon package, but that we can watch on any device—computer, tablet, or TV with an inexpensive “streaming device.”

Recently, YouTube began selling a new streaming service called YouTube TV for \$40/month, which includes live, local TV station broadcasts, and a few dozen “cable” channels, such as MSNBC, Fox News, ESPN, and so on. And that’s a game changer, because you only need internet service—not TV program service—to watch “TV” on ANY device in your home. YouTube TV also lets you save programs on its servers to watch at your convenience—like a virtual DVR.

I wanted to get rid of all my Verizon gear, most of the 315 channels, and button-bound remotes and use a streaming service, but YouTube TV doesn’t offer (for now) HGTV, which my wife likes.

When Hulu TV began offering TV service (\$40/month—a coincidence? I think not.) that includes HGTV, we decided it was time to take the bold step

and drop our TV service in favor of a dual package of insanely high-speed (gigabit) internet service plus phone for \$145/month. (The phone service is only \$10). My smart TV¹ has Hulu built in, and by adding three Roku streaming devices for \$30 each to our other TVs, we can now watch anything we want on any TV, tablet, or computer. The DVR, cable boxes, 315 channels, and remotes went back to Verizon.

Hulu TV lets you set up individual “profiles” for your family members allowing them to select the channels and programs they like to watch. The remote controls (either for a smart TV or streaming device like Apple TV or Roku) are simple. And you can watch anything—live or recorded—on any device, even when you’re out of town, as long as you have internet service. TV in bed? Not a problem—just grab your smart phone along with your Teddy Bear (or spouse). On a boat or with a goat? Here, There, and Everywhere? Sure.

Are we saving any money? Not much—maybe \$20 a month—because triple-pay packages offer discounts on the individual services, and when you unbundle them, the separate services are more expensive. YouTube TV and Hulu have fine-tuned their monthly costs to be competitive, but only a bit, and I had to pay Hulu another \$15/month to allow us to skip recorded commercials. Bummer.

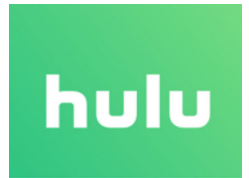
That said, cable providers are losing TV customers who have discovered streaming services, so this isn’t a passing fancy. But there’s no rush, either. I’m confident that streaming services will offer more channels and conveniences in the months and years to come, and we’ll all learn more.

For additional information on streaming services, pick up a copy of the August 2018 edition of *Consumer Reports*, “Dear Cable TV, You’re Fired!”

If you need help with streaming services, please visit our Technology Lab on Tuesdays from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m., Wednesdays from 1:30 to 4 p.m., or Fridays from 10:00 a.m. until 12:00 noon.

YouTube TV

YouTube TV offers local TV and cable channels...



Live TV

...as does Hulu with Live TV

¹ Smart TVs allow you to install “apps” such as YouTube, or Hulu, or HBO-Now, like a tablet or smart phone. You can make most any TV into a smart TV by adding an inexpensive streaming device such as a Roku, Amazon FireTV, or Apple TV.