



How to
**Get More Movies
and TV Channels for
Half the Cost**





How to Get More Movies and TV Channels for HALF the Cost

By Ted Bauman, Editor, *The Bauman Letter*

YOU have to hand it to the cable and satellite companies. It was a great business while it lasted, charging people more and more money each and every year to watch their hundreds of channels of programming.

According to researchers at the Federal Communication Commission, back in 1995 Americans paid an average of around \$22 a month for expanded basic cable television service. By 2014, the same package of programming cost more than \$66 a month. That's an annual gain in price of nearly 6% a year (nearly triple the official rate of inflation), and a rise of 300% in 20 years.

And keep in mind, that's an average. Yours is probably a lot more.

Fortunately, these days, we have a lot of options to lower the cost of watching movies and television. And each year, more people are taking action to do just that.

In 2010, a record 87% of all American households subscribed to a cable- or satellite-TV service. Today, that number is down to 83%. According to researchers at Moffett-Nathanson, a little more than 350,000 people dropped their pay-TV subscriptions, just in the third quarter of 2015.

“Cutting the cord” isn't for everyone, but it is an option. Best of all, cable-TV companies can see this trend as well — which makes them more motivated in keeping you happy (for a change) so you don't cut the cord yourself. That's why we believe that, if you're willing to think “outside the box” (the TV box, that is), you could cut your monthly bill in HALF if you're willing to stay flexible, use the advantages of the Internet, and follow the tips inside this report.

Are you ready to pay a lot LESS for your video entertainment and information? Let's get started!

Four Simple Words for a Lower Cable or Satellite Bill

If you think what you're paying each month is too high, the easiest alternative you have is to call your provider's customer service line and just tell them: “I want to pay less.”

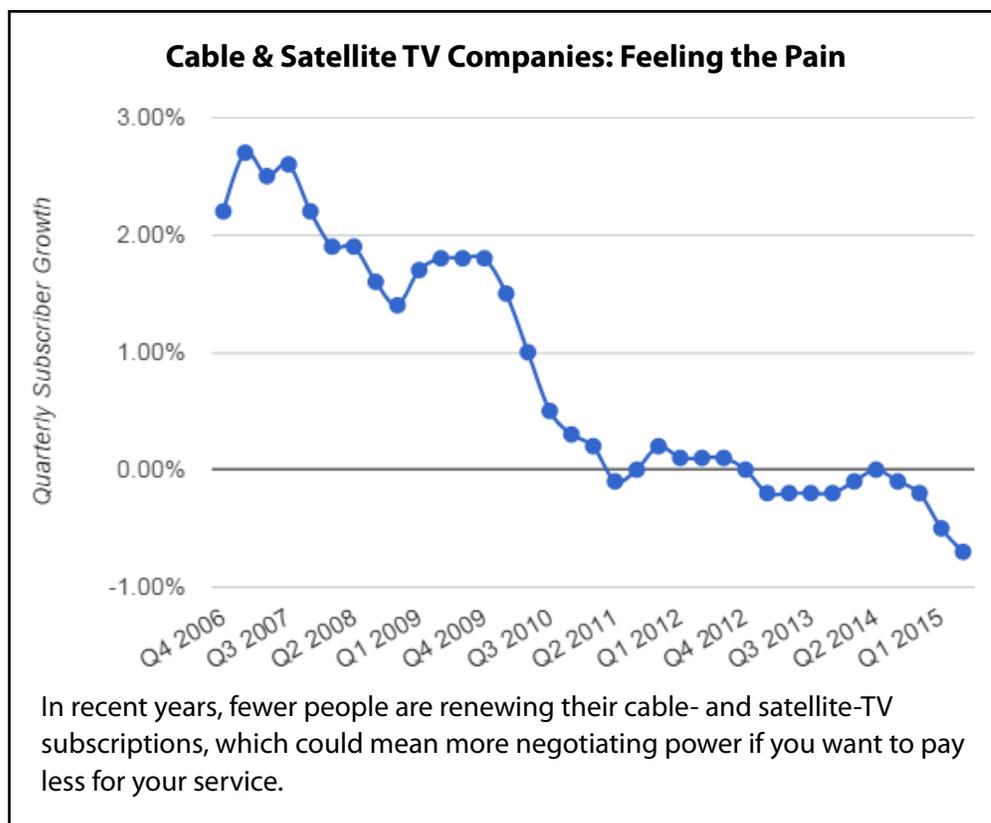
It's that simple. Now, you might ask, “My cable provider is a gigantic company with millions of customers. I'm just one person. Why would they bother negotiating with me?”

The answer is that you are very important to your cable or satellite company. These corporations spend millions of dollars each month marketing their services — on television, billboards, and the Internet — to get you as a customer. Once they have you in the system, their aim is to sell you more and more products and services. When you (and millions of other customers) call and say “I can't afford my cable bill anymore; I'm leaving,” — these companies risk flushing much of their marketing budget right down the drain, in addition to

the money you spend on cable and other services each month.

Ultimately, it costs a lot more for them to get a new customer. It costs a lot less to keep a current customer happy. The cable and satellite companies know all this; they just don't want you to know it!

They have other reasons to negotiate. The pay-TV landscape is getting tougher and tougher as a portion of cable subscribers “cut the cord” entirely (more on cutting the cord yourself, later in this report). Pay-TV providers don't want that to happen if they can help it. Just check out the chart to see where their subscriber growth is headed these days:



So how do you negotiate for a lower bill?

Take note of four other simple words you can say when you call your cable company. All you have to say is “The retention department, please.”

You see, sometimes it's not what you know, but rather who you talk to — that gets you a better deal on your pay-TV bill.

A regular service rep's job is to sign up new people and deal with existing ones, and that's about it. On the other hand, the job of ‘customer retention specialist’ is to keep existing customers from leaving the company. The rep's pay depends on it. So companies often give their retention specialists more power to deal with customers' specific needs — and more access to deals that a regular customer service rep wouldn't know about.

At many companies, the retention specialists are paid an extra commission for every “save” (meaning, every time they can keep an existing customer from leaving), so they have an extra incentive to be nice, and to deal with you one-on-one to keep you happy.

Some people have cut their bills by nearly 40%, just by asking for a retention specialist whose job is to keep customers (instead of the usual cable company customer-service runaround, where the strategy seems to be to make people even more mad and lose them forever as subscribers).

Note what your pay-TV provider's competitors are offering: You likely get flyers in the mail, and special email offers all the time, offering you pay-TV deals of one kind or another. Use that information to your benefit by noting who's making the offers and what's included in the price.

Why is that important? Information is power, and you can use competitors' deals as a lever to pry open a better deal for yourself with your present pay-TV provider.

Know your own bill and “bundles”: It’s also important to study your own bill and its specific details. Are you locked in, and for how long? Note exactly what channels you’re paying for.

Likewise, many people have other services bundled into their cable bill, like an Internet connection or a home phone line. Even if you don’t have extra services, it’s helpful to know what other services your pay-TV provider offers. These are all chips you can play when the time comes for listening to your service rep, and any forthcoming new deals that he or she may offer.

Don’t take no for an answer: Do you know why most companies’ “customer service” operations are so dismal at actually offering service for customers? Because the whole process is designed to wear you down and force you to accept the status quo. So when you call up, asking for a better deal, don’t expect the rep on the other end of the phone to say “yes” the first time around. He or she is paid to say “no” (and hope you’ll hang up and forget about paying a lower price).

That’s when you pull out the information about your provider’s competitor(s). Tell them you are thinking about cancelling your service to go with the competitor’s offer. Keep in mind, you may still get a “no” from the rep, especially if you still have a ways to go on your service contract.

Don’t bluster, don’t threaten. Be nice about it and hang up. Call back again in a month or two, and ask again. You’ll get a different rep. Make the same pitch for a lower cable bill. The closer you get to the end of your service agreement, the more likely it is that the rep will make you a deal. So let time — and information about competitors’ deals — be your friend, and use it to your advantage.

“Know thyself”: You need to think about what you want out of your pay-TV offerings. Suppose you call up and say “I want a lower cable bill” and the customer service rep says “OK, we’ll give you six months of free HBO.” You need to ask yourself whether you really watch HBO. How much is that six months’ additional service really worth to you?

Don’t Rent Your Modem, Buy It!

Be honest, when was the last time you really looked at the bill from your pay-TV provider? For lots of us, if we examine it at all, we look at the cost of the monthly package prices, and that’s it. When was the last time you looked at the cost of the rental fee for your modem?

The modem (some call it a ‘router’ instead) is a little box of chips, circuits and software that, in essence, translates the digital signals coming through your cable or satellite connection, and spits those signals out as the hundreds of channels you can watch on your television.

When people sign up for their programming packages as new customers, they’re asked whether they to rent the cable or satellite company’s modem, or buy a modem instead. Most people choose to rent because it’s one less thing to think about. But that’s where the pay-TV operators get you. They’ll put the rental fee on your bill each month (and it won’t be listed as something obvious, like “modem,” by the way. It will say “voice/data equipment” or some other generic-sounding term) and hope you don’t notice when they raise the fee bit by bit each year. For instance, in 2015, Comcast raised its modem rental fee from \$8, to \$10 a month. That’s \$120 a year ... just to rent a little box ... a little box *you could just as easily buy on your own.*

And do you know what the cost of a modem is? Anywhere from \$60 to \$120. Which means that, in one year, your modem purchase has pretty much paid for itself.

It takes a little extra work on your part, but it’s not hard to do, and well worth it to your pocketbook.

First, you’ll need to make a decision about your future as a satellite or cable-TV customer. If you think you might switch providers within a year or so, you’ll want to forego buying your own modem — because it

may not be compatible if or when you sign up with another satellite or cable-TV competitor.

Two, you'll need to look up your provider's compatible modems. You can find the information easily on the Internet, just by typing in your pay-TV provider's name and the words "compatible modems" on your browser's search window. The first listing or two will likely be the specific "compatible modems" page from your provider's website.

Three, you may want to double-check their web information by calling your pay-TV provider's customer service line and asking for someone in "technical support" to confirm the compatibility of the modem.

Four, you can buy compatible modems pretty much anywhere. Some people order them off the Internet, others purchase them in their local Walmart or Best Buy store.

A final note: After hearing the news that you want to buy your own modem, your friendly pay-TV customer service rep may try to talk you out of your decision. Their typical warning is that your modem could quickly be obsolete or out of date. That's true, in the sense that communications technology gets better and faster all the time. But unless you absolutely need the "latest and greatest," don't worry — you'll get years of good use from your modem regardless.

Cut the Cord: Join the "Davids" Taking on the Cable "Goliaths"

In the biblical story of David and Goliath, a young shepherd boy ventures out alone to take on the biggest, strongest man among all the soldiers in an invading army. Even on the shepherd's own side, few expect him to live out the day.

Unlike his opponent, David has no sword. He can't overpower his enemy either. But he can out-think and out-maneuver Goliath. Using his only weapon, a sling (remember that word), David flings his rock-filled weapon again and again at Goliath's head, killing him and winning an incredible victory.

And so it is with a handful of companies, with names like Sling TV and Netflix, taking on the cable "Goliaths" these days, and winning important victories for their customers.

"Streaming packages" is sort of a catch-all term for a growing number of Internet sites that, for a small monthly fee, offer you a variety of video entertainment programming choices — weekly programs, movies, sports programming, the works.

You might ask, "Well, isn't that what I do already with my pay-TV provider?" With streaming video packages, you can narrow your programming choices down to only the handful of channels (or as you'll see, individual video programs) that you want to pay for. Unlike traditional pay-TV, you're not paying for the other 150 channels' worth of programming that you never watch.

There are two other advantages of streaming packages. One is that there are usually no contracts involved, so you can cancel whenever you feel like it. Second is that you can watch your favorite video programs anywhere you can get a decently fast Internet connection. If you're stuck at work, at the airport, or in a car, you can still watch the programming on nearly any mobile device.

But, there are a handful of downsides that you need to consider. The most important is to remember that if you drop your pay-TV provider entirely, and then don't pay attention to how many streaming packages you've signed yourself up for, you could wind up with a monthly bill comparable to what you already have with your pay-TV provider now.

The other thing you'll need to realize is that you're not going to be able to watch a current episode of your favorite weekly program until the day after it airs. That's one of the carrots that the pay-TV providers dangle in front of their customers to keep them from jumping ship.

But even there, you might have an alternative if your favorite weekly program originates from one of the old-line broadcast networks like ABC, NBC, CBS or Fox Television. We'll talk more about how to do it in the next section ("Cut the Cord — Free Broadcast TV").

Finally, consider where you'll watch the streaming programming. Top tech companies such as Apple, Amazon, Google, and Roku all make devices that make it possible to watch streaming video on your television. And of course, if you own a smartphone, tablet, laptop or desktop computer with broadband Internet access, you'll be able to watch on those devices. Newer "smart" televisions sold in the last few years also come with the built-in ability to stream Internet video.

So when it comes to paying for a streaming service versus your pay-TV provider, you'll need to do some hard thinking...

- What do you really watch most of the time?
- What programming choices are you willing to actually pay for?
- Do you care if you can't watch a favorite weekly program or sporting event "live"?
- How important is it to have (or not have) lots and lots of channels to surf with your TV remote?

Sling TV: If you want channels (instead of individual programs), this is one of the most popular ways to go. In 2015, the company (a subsidiary of pay-TV provider Dish Network) began offering a "Best of Live TV" \$20 a month streaming package that includes many of the most popular channels you'd watch on basic cable-TV anyway, such as TBS, HGTV, CNN, Cartoon Network, Disney Channel, and ESPN. For additional increments of \$5 a month, you can upgrade to add more of ESPN's secondary channels, as well as kids, lifestyle or news channels.

Netflix: The largest of the streaming operators, Netflix began streaming movies and video programming through the Internet back in 2007. As of early 2016, it offered plans from \$8 to \$12 a month for unlimited viewing of the vast array of movies, original Netflix programs, and off-cable series in its inventory.

CBS All Access: The television network began offering CBS All Access in 2015 for \$7 a month (with ads), though the company appears to be on its way to offering an ad-free stream for a bit more in price. For that price, you get access to 60 Minutes and all the rest of the network's entertainment programming.

Hulu.com: Hulu is a joint venture Internet streaming company created by the other three major TV networks in the United States: NBC Universal, Disney-ABC Television, and Fox Television. Like most of the other streaming services, it offers pay-as-you-go monthly packages between \$8 and \$12 (as of early 2016).

Amazon.com: The Internet retailer offers its own well-regarded streaming video service. Most people opt

Popular Streaming Video Providers		
Streaming Provider	Monthly Fee	What You Get:
Sling TV	\$20	TBS, ESPN, AMC, Disney (23 channels total)
Netflix	\$7.99 - \$11.99	Unlimited movies & TV shows
CBS All Access	\$5.99	CBS entertainment shows (new episodes, day after first broadcast) with ads; classic sitcoms
Hulu.com	\$7.99 - \$11.99	NBC/ABC programs (new episodes, day after first broadcast); no commercials with higher price
Amazon	\$99/year (Prime)	Unlimited movies & TV shows

for a Prime membership, about \$8 a month (\$99 for the year), giving you access to thousands of movies and television programs for as much viewing as you want. For a little more, people can add on subscriptions for Showtime and other specialty streams.

We've listed five of the most popular streaming services here. But remember that this is a rapidly changing, fast-growing area. Prices can change (the ones listed here are as of March 2016); use the Internet to stay abreast of new services and packages, because new ones are being announced all the time.

For instance, the major sports leagues such as the NFL, NBA, MLB, NHL and NASCAR, now offer their own subscription-only services for their fans to watch their games and races online. But sometimes the services come with caveats or strings attached.

Quite often, local blackout restrictions may apply, so you can't watch your team play its home games "live" if you live in the same metro area. Other services, like NFL Game Pass, only allow streaming of games as replays — not as live events (to preserve the audience for the cable and TV networks that pay billions of dollars in exclusive broadcast rights).

But even here, it pays to double-check your options. The NFL may forbid live streaming of its games, but customers of Verizon Wireless can watch games live — if they subscribe to a service called NFL Mobile (an exclusive deal between Verizon and the league).

The main point with Internet streaming is that if your monthly cable or satellite bill is too high, you have alternatives — if you don't mind narrowing down your viewing choices to only the types of programming you're willing to pay for, and foregoing the rest.

Cut the Cord — Get *Free Broadcast Television*

When it comes to dropping their expensive cable or satellite TV connections, the big question for many people is "How else do I watch my local TV stations that carry CBS, NBC, ABC, Fox and PBS?"

It's a good point, because those channels not only carry popular national network programming, but important local broadcasts for news, weather and public affairs. But most people don't realize (or forget) they have a free alternative built right into their TV sets: "over the air" channel reception.

You see, local TV stations still broadcast all their programming on to the public airwaves (in addition to sending out over the wires of the local cable-TV operator). And by law, all televisions sold in the United States — even the newest, biggest, flattest, most high-tech versions out there — must be sold with a built-in receiver to haul in those "wireless" local television broadcasts.

The best part is those broadcast signals are 100% digital. And if the programming was shot with high-definition (HD) cameras, such as a football game, then it's broadcast in full HD as well!

So the video quality, when it comes to watching a program "over the air," is often slightly better than watching the same program on a cable or satellite connection. (Digital video signals tend to lose a little bit of quality each time they're encrypted or compressed by processing software, "bounced" off satellites and then run through miles of cables and switching gear — that happens multiple times before the signal from a cable or satellite operator gets to your home.)

What Stations Can I View? If you want to see just how many TV stations you're likely to receive "over the air," you can go to an Internet site set up by the National Association of Broadcasters, www.antennaweb.org/address to help you do just that. All you have to do is enter your zip code or home address, and up pops a map showing the location, transmission strength, and affiliated TV network of all the local broadcasting towers in your area.

You can also try the FCC's website at www.transition.fcc.gov/mb/engineering/dTVmaps. If you click on any of the color-coded station "call signs," you'll see a map that shows you the "reach" of that station's broadcasting signal. As an example, we're showing a coverage map for WAGA-TV, the Fox affiliate station in Atlanta, Georgia.

Do I need an antenna? The short answer is "Yes." Investing in a small indoor antenna is essential to pulling in the maximum number of "over the air" TV signals. They're cheap to buy; as little as \$10 for a basic version. Even a top-of-the-line indoor model costs just \$50 (or the equivalent of half of just one month's cable bill!)

And don't worry, we're not talking about the ugly, old-style "rabbit ear" antennas of 40 years ago. Today's indoor antennas are basically thin, flat, plastic panels (with some wires and circuitry embedded inside), and they're usually no bigger than the size of a tablet or laptop computer.

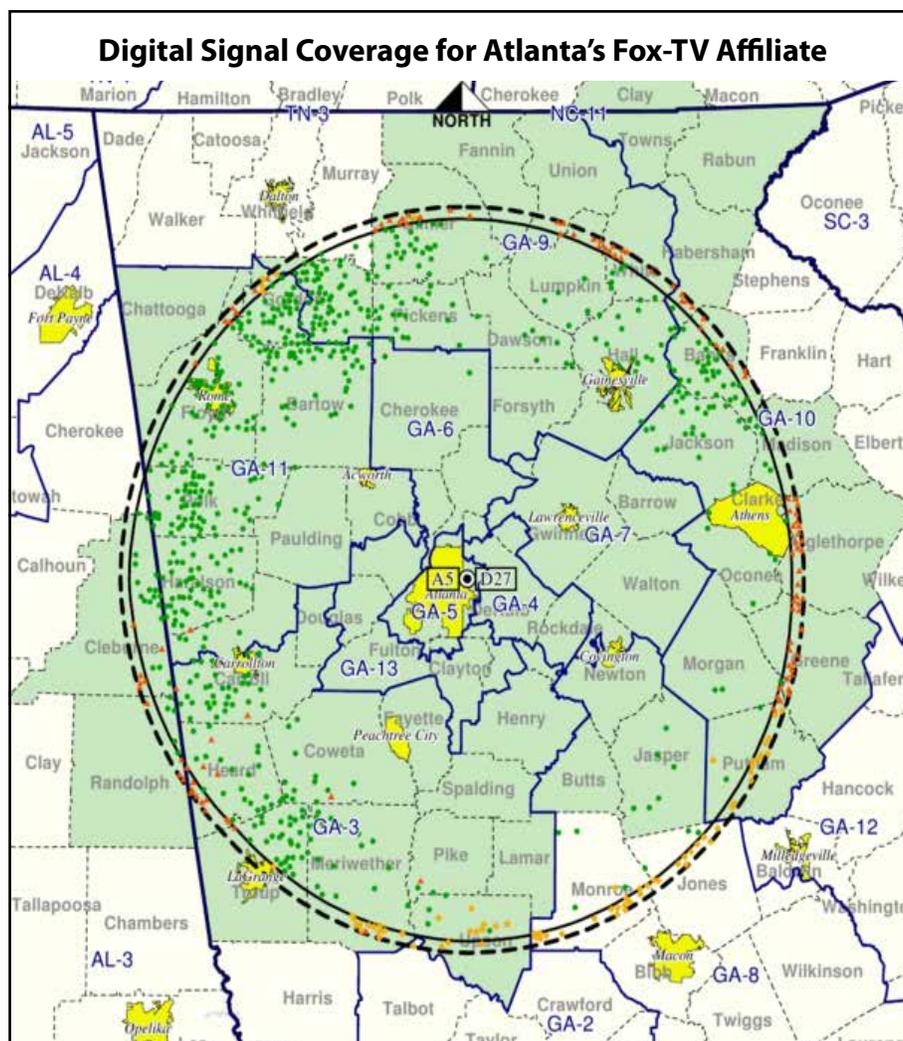
They're sold with the coaxial cable already attached (you plug the other end into the back of your television); often they're made so you can stick them to windows or attach them in other low-profile ways near your television (or even behind it). You can even paint your antenna, if you desire, so it matches your home or apartment's decor.

If you live in a major metropolitan area, chances are you'll easily receive the broadcasting signals from most of the major TV stations in your area. (Make sure to check out the antenna-reception websites in the previous section before you buy an antenna.) The closer you are to a particular station's transmission tower, the more powerful the signal. TV signals go further in flat areas, while mountains and buildings tend to obstruct them.

How do I set up my television to receive these broadcasts? First things first — how old is your TV set? If you've purchased any kind of television since 2007, then the set already includes a built-in digital tuner. If you have a TV purchased before 2007, read a few paragraphs lower.

For 2007 or later television sets:

- Pick up your TV's remote device (make sure it's the remote for your TV and not the remotes for your pay-TV service if you haven't cancelled it yet), and hit the "menu" button.



SOURCE: Federal Communications Commission

- You should see an entry on the menu screen that says something like “Tuning” or “Signal” (the specifics of the menu depend on your set’s manufacturer).
- Once you choose that menu item, you’ll be asked whether you want to configure your TV for “antenna” or “cable” (sometimes it will say “CATV” which is the same thing as cable).
- Choose “antenna,” and the TV’s own circuitry will automatically scan the airwaves for any broadcasting signals. Be patient; sometimes it can take a minute or so for the set’s electronic system to complete the scan.
- After completing the same, you may want to try moving your indoor antenna to a few other spots around the room, then re-run your TV’s channel scan a second time — and see if a different location in the room yields even more broadcast TV channels.

For pre-2007 TV sets:

If you bought your TV no earlier than two years before 2007, it may still have a digital tuner inside. It depends on the screen size and when it was manufactured and exported to the United States (since most TVs are made in Asia):

If Your TV was Exported to the United States By:	Your TV’s Screen Size:	Built-in Digital Tuner?
July 1, 2005	Over 36 inches	Yes
March 1, 2006	Over 25 inches	Yes
March 1, 2007*	All screen sizes	Yes

*Federal regulators also decreed that, by this date, all VCRs (video cassette recorders), as well as all DVD players and DVR (digital video recorders) must also be sold with built-in digital tuners. So even if your TV doesn’t have a digital tuner, it’s possible that one of these other devices may also receive digital broadcast signals which you could view on your set.

If you’re still not sure if your TV has a built-in digital tuner, check out the back of your existing television set. It will have a label of some kind, indicating the name of the manufacturer, its model number and registration or serial number. If it says something like “DTV,” “HDTV,” “ATSC,” then you are in luck. The label might also say “Digital Tuner,” “Digital Receiver,” “Integrated Digital Tuner” or “Digital Tuner Built In” — if you see any of those phrases, again, your TV probably already receives digital over-the-air broadcasts.

OK, now suppose you have an even older TV set? That’s fine, because you still have options (though whether it’s really practical or not (versus just buying a cheap new all-digital TV set) is up to you.

You can buy a separate “digital converter” device, basically a black box with some circuits inside (with a few connector cables and its own remote), costing \$30 to \$50.

It sounds complicated, but in simple terms, the converter box pulls in all those digital broadcasting signals and converts them into “analog” signals that your TV can recognize and put up on its screen.

When you buy a digital converter, here’s what you’ll do...

- Hook up the converter box to the back of your TV set.
- Don’t forget to connect your antenna to the back of the converter so it can pull in the maximum number of channels.
- You’ll need to set your TV to channel 3 or channel 4 to see the output from the converter unit.

Once you do the steps above, you should see the menu thrown up on the TV screen by the converter box. It will walk you through a brief tutorial and “sniff” the airwaves for TV signals. After that, you’re done — you’ll use the converter’s remote device to switch back and forth between your various “over the air” TV stations.

What kind of channels can I receive? The beauty of free over-the-air television is that there really are lots of channels to choose from – even if you live in an area where there aren’t that many TV stations.

You see, when federal regulators began the process of transitioning the nation’s local broadcasters over to all-digital signals, they gave every TV station owner additional digital channel assignments so they could deliver other kinds of programming (and generate more revenue through advertising).

You’ll find that your favorite local channel will also be beaming sometimes one or two additional channels — one might specialize in ‘movie classics,’ and the other might carry sitcom reruns (for instance, let’s say your station is a “Channel 10” — then your TV will call these additional channels “10-1” and “10-2.” You’ll find your local PBS station also beams out additional channels’ worth of programming for documentaries, home improvement, cooking and a myriad of other subjects.

On Your Way...to Saving Money

We know how you’re probably feeling right about now. You can see the opportunity ahead, but you might be a little nervous, and that’s perfectly understandable. Try and make your changes in easy steps, slow and easy.

For some people, negotiating for a lower cable bill is satisfying enough. For others, “cutting the cord” completely is the right way to go. Only you know what’s best for you. Either way, you’ll be on your way to taking control of your viewing choices, and what you pay for them (and your pocketbook will thank you).

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ted Bauman', followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

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