

Are you ready for life without cable TV?

There are many things in life that just don't seem quite fair.

Let's take for example the cost of cable TV in a business office. When I moved into my new space last year I wanted to have a TV in my office so that I can have CNBC on and keep an eye on any news affecting the markets. I only needed very basic cable so I thought I had an idea of what it would cost.

Turns out I was wrong.

Apparently just the fact that the TV is located in a commercial space rather than a residence means that I get to pay about double what I expected. Ridiculous. (Though I will admit that I really enjoy having it because yes, I am the type that enjoys watching the rolling ticker tape.)

Regardless of where it is located, the cost of cable TV has skyrocketed over the last decade with the average monthly residential bill climbing to nearly \$90 for basic and premium channels, according to the NPD Group, a market research firm. To make matters worse, cable bills are on track to reach \$200 per month in 2020, NPD says, as customers shell out about 6 percent more annually.

There are so many things that an extra \$90 a month could be used for; paying down high interest debt, saving for college or investing for retirement being just a few. But cable TV has become such an ingrained part of our culture that it might be hard to imagine life without it. The growth of satellite alternatives like DirecTV and Dish Network has perhaps helped keep costs from spiraling completely out of control but even those alternatives are not necessarily a bargain.

Perhaps a true alternative is arising as the Internet ushers in a host of new viewing options for traditional TV programs and even dedicated programing available only on-line.

If you have access to high speed internet you can view full episodes of some programs for free on the websites of major networks like NBC, ABC, and FOX. Additionally, you can view a variety of TV shows and movies on Hulu without a subscription.

If you want more options you can subscribe to a video-on-demand streaming service like Netflix, Hulu Plus or Amazon Prime. These services allow you to watch a wide variety of TV shows and movies at any time you choose. Averaging around \$8 per month these services can be a steal compared to an average cable bill.

If you can't tear yourself away from the 60 inch flat screen you can even use a device like Apple TV, Roku or a gaming system like the Nintendo Wii to stream the internet programing directly on your TV.

Believe it or not, there is also still “old fashioned” TV available via antenna. Depending on where you live and the type of antenna you use you may be able to pick up live HD programming from some or all of the major networks and their subsidiaries. I’ve routinely been able to access as many as 12 channels via the antenna in our camper.

Of course, cable TV hasn’t been around this long by accident. Before you cut the cord, be sure you’re ready to part with the perks.

Cable does certainly provide a lot of variety and there are some shows, especially those on premium channels like HBO or Showtime, that you can’t access through on-line services. And often even when a program is available through an on-line option it is delayed so you have to try and avoid the spoiler before you get the chance to watch it.

Perhaps the biggest reason that many people keep cable however is for coverage of live sporting events. Some of us are even crazy enough to pay extra for things like the NFL Sunday Ticket so we can see every NFL game... but I digress.

The bottom line is that cutting the cable cord isn’t an option for all of us, despite the clear financial benefits of doing so. For those of you that are in my camp consider looking at options of bundling your cable with your phone and/or internet. The cost savings can be significant.

If all else fails, simply call your cable provider and try to negotiate a better deal. You’d be amazed how often they are willing offer a lower rate if you simply ask.

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