

Cutting the Cable

Maxwell Memorial Library's Technology Class
Thursday, January 24, 2019

0. Introduction

The question of whether one can cancel cable TV comes up more and more. Though the answer still seems to be “It depends,” the venues for finding online video entertainment, documentaries, and other things cable provides continue to increase.

This month we'll look at online video services and at devices you can use with them to get a larger picture than your computer screen provides.

1. What's involved in moving away from cable?

- Assess your viewing needs
- Consider what collection of services best addresses those needs.
- Get any hardware you might need.
- In particular, get an HD antenna.
Note that this may be futile in Camillus.
- Set software up that allows you to stream content that you own.

2. Assessment

From [Noel Murray's NYT](#) article:

“If your answer is ‘I want it all,’ then honestly, you may be better off sticking with cable or satellite, because getting it ‘all’ piecemeal will likely be prohibitively expensive.”

Murray's article has a section with his recommendations of services for 10 different sorts of tastes.

3. How to get programs

3.1. Streaming services

3.2. Cable replacement services

3.3. Stand-alone network subscriptions

Kind of like an *à la carte* cable replacement: Subscribe to a variety of networks' online services individually.

3.4. Some local stations put their local newscasts online for free

- [WSYR \(https://www.localsyr.com/live-video\)](https://www.localsyr.com/live-video)
- [WSTM \(https://cnycentral.com/watch\)](https://cnycentral.com/watch)

4. What all will you need?

4.1. High-speed Internet

How fast it needs to be will depend on how high the definition (resolution) is that you're wanting to get.

4.2. Software to allow you to stream the content you own

4.3. Streaming device

4.4. HD antenna

Generally, a passive HD antenna should work for stations up to 20 miles away. An amplified antenna gives you stations up to 50 miles away. When local conditions make even amplified indoor antennas not so great, an outdoor antenna (either passive or amplified but, ideally, 30 feet above the ground) may be needed.

When I went to [AntennaWeb.org \(http://www.antennaweb.org/\)](http://www.antennaweb.org), though, it gave WSPX-TV (15) as the only station that could be picked up even with an antenna 30 feet above the ground.

5. Be aware

From the Chris Heinonen and Daniel Varghese article at *Wirecutter*:

One note of caution: if you do decide to cancel your cable subscription, there is no perfect method to cut the cord and no magic configuration that will give you all the access that you're used to with cable at a deep discount. You will likely have to subscribe to a patchwork of different services to get all the channels and shows you want to watch. And even then you might have to forgo watching certain shows live and decide to sacrifice access to channels you're used to having.

6. Huff Po flags (all 5 + 1 of them)

6.1. *Issues with keeping a continuous stream (even given buffering) for live events*

For instance, stalling in Super Bowl (or sportscasts in general)

6.2. *You will have to give some content up.*

Hopefully, it's only content that you don't care about, but even that is unlikely.

This point seems obvious, but it's worth thinking about. In a way it's like moving to a new city more than it is like switching from iPhone to Android, say. Changing platforms for your device means adjusting to somewhat different interfaces for otherwise familiar apps, but changing video providers can result in major changes to the content that you have access to.

Ask yourself whether you could live with just the channels you'll have after cutting (maybe even try it before you switch). The point of this exercise is that you know what you'll be losing while any potential benefits of the switch are more speculative.

6.3. *Getting all the live sports coverage you want to see may be a nightmare.*

Point (1) above was about the tech. Point (3) is about law, specifically licensing. The rights to broadcast/stream may as well have been sliced & diced. Media companies, of course, want exclusive rights to control both streaming and broadcast/cable. All that is subject to negotiation.

One anecdote in the article talked about a game cutting off during the 4th quarter of a game (allegedly because of streaming rights). That seems odd to me that a company would have rights to stream almost but not quite all of a game, so I'm taking that with a bit of salt.

6.4. High speed Internet in the US is not world class

Despite the US's being the birthplace of the Internet, other places in the world have done a better job of getting high-speed Internet out there.

Articles to look at here:

- [A Map of Who's Got the Best \(And Worst\) Internet Connections in America](#) by Reuben Fischer-Baum 9/05/13 at Gizmodo

The map in the article shows Upstate NY as having fair to average speed. This is using the already slow US average as the benchmark. Note that the article's 5+ years old, so its absolute numbers are no longer relevant, but the relative state of what areas have decent speeds has probably changed more slowly, especially since the map seems to be largely a reflection of where high speed has been introduced and that seems, according to Fischer-Baum, to correlate with per capita income for an area.

- [The U.S. ranks 28th in the world in mobile internet speeds: We have slower mobile internet than Greece. Greece!](#) By Rani Molla@ranimolla Jun 7, 2017 at Recode

We ranked 10th for wired speed

- [U.S. internet speeds rose nearly 40 percent this year: New Jersey had the fastest broadband, while Maine had the slowest.](#) By Rani Molla@ranimolla Dec 12, 2018 also at Recode

43rd in mobile speed (up from 44th 1 year earlier)

Up from 10th to 7th place in wired speed.

6.5. Just getting rid of cable may cost you (even before adding streaming)

If you've got a package deal, cutting TV out of the package may result in higher costs for the other services in the package. This may negate any savings from the change. Check your with your Internet service provider, but be aware that since some of your current package deal may speed provided and liberal or nonexistent data caps, some costs of switching may be hidden from you before hand. They would enter in the form of fees and charges for going over your data allowance, for instance.

6.6. (The article's Bonus section): Content changes rapidly

Streaming services showing more of their own original content (not a bad thing) and less from 3rd parties, or they may have extra charges to watch popular shows or movies.

Of course, content on cable also changes, so this is a blade that cuts both ways.

7. Articles and webpages with more information

7.1. Some comprehensive articles on the whole process

Chris Heinonen and Daniel Varghese, "[Cutting the Cord: Alternatives to Cable and Satellite TV](https://thewirecutter.com/reviews/how-to-cut-the-cord-and-what-to-do-if-you-cant/)," *Wirecutter*, updated December 18, 2018, <https://thewirecutter.com/reviews/how-to-cut-the-cord-and-what-to-do-if-you-cant/>

Marshall Honorof, "[Your Guide to Cable TV Cord-Cutting](https://www.tomsguide.com/us/cord-cutting-guide,news-17928.html)," *Tom's Guide*, updated January 15, 2019, <https://www.tomsguide.com/us/cord-cutting-guide,news-17928.html>

Nicely structured article and a quick read. Be warned, though, that all the *Tom's Guide* articles here were more ad-heavy than I like, and though ads were marked as such, the markings seemed a bit subtle to me.

Noel Murray, "[How to Cut the Cord on Cable](https://www.nytimes.com/guides/watching/tv-streaming-cut-the-cord)," *The New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/guides/watching/tv-streaming-cut-the-cord>

There's no human-readable date on the article, but the metadata gives creation and update dates from 2017-11-29 through 2018-08-20.

The article is quite comprehensive (in an "All the News That's Fit to Print" way) and is structured in a way to help you decide what options might be best for what you want to do.

7.2. Issues to consider

Don Reisinger, "[How to Get Better Reception with Your TV Antenna](https://www.tomsguide.com/us/get-better-tv-antenna-reception,review-4064.html)," *Tom's Guide*, November 10, 2018, <https://www.tomsguide.com/us/get-better-tv-antenna-reception,review-4064.html>

Todd Van Luling, "[5 Cable-Cutting Problems You Probably Didn't Think About: Some Important Things to Keep in Mind Before You Cut the Cord](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/cable-cord-cutting-problems_us_5a81adb9e4b044b3821fa129)," *The Huffington Post*, February 12, 2018, updated January 10, 2019, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/cable-cord-cutting-problems_us_5a81adb9e4b044b3821fa129

7.3. Reviews

Sean Captain & Michael Andronico, "[PlayStation Vue Review: The Best Way to Cut the Cord](https://www.tomsguide.com/us/playstation-vue-online-tv-service,review-2698.html)," *Tom's Guide*, January 31, 2017, <https://www.tomsguide.com/us/playstation-vue-online-tv-service,review-2698.html>

Jefferson Graham, "[Cutting the Cord: Which Cable TV Alternatives Make the Grade?](https://www.usatoday.com/story/tech/talkingtech/2018/12/04/cord-cutting-cable-tv-alternatives-guide/1992033002/)" *USA Today*, December 4, 2018,

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/tech/talkingtech/2018/12/04/cord-cutting-cable-tv-alternatives-guide/1992033002/>

Marshall Honorof, "[Sling TV Review: Cheap Cable TV for Cord Cutters,](https://www.tomsguide.com/us/sling-tv-online-video-service,review-2608.html)" *Tom's Guide*, January 23, 2019, <https://www.tomsguide.com/us/sling-tv-online-video-service,review-2608.html>

Brian Westover, "[Best Indoor HDTV Antennas of 2019,](https://www.tomsguide.com/us/best-tv-antennas,review-2354.html)" *Tom's Guide*, January 2, 2019, <https://www.tomsguide.com/us/best-tv-antennas,review-2354.html>