

## Introduction to Cord Cutting

Nobody likes writing that big check to the cable or Satellite company every month, especially to pay for a lot of channels you never watch. The answer for many people is to become a “cord cutter” and cancel your cable. Currently about 6.5% of American households have chosen to tell the cable company to take a hike. So the question becomes, can you get rid of cable (I will use the term cable but that includes any method to bring TV into your home other than an antenna) and still watch what you want. The short answer? It depends.

Any replacement for your cable box will require that you be able to stream internet to your TV. This will require a high speed Internet connection (broadband) and either a Smart TV with built in networking capabilities or an add on streaming box such as Roku, Apple TV etc.

Depending on what you want to watch it may or may not be possible to get rid of your current TV provider. The first question to answer is what do you want to watch? Do you primarily:

Watch programs from the National Networks (ABC, CBS, NBC and Fox).

Watch local stations for news and local events.

Watch cable channels (AMC, TNT, TCM etc.).

Watch sports (NFL, MLB, NBA, and College etc.).

Most people watch some combination of the above.

If you just watch prime time network shows you can replace you cable fairly easily. Most network prime time shows are available over the internet directly from the network or from another source such as Hulu or Netflix. The downside is that most of them are delayed anywhere from a day to a week. The good news is that they haven't been able to sell as much ad time on the streaming shows so you usually only get about 2 minutes of ads per ½ hour show versus the 8 minute average for live TV.

If you want local channels it gets more difficult. Local channels are still available Over the Air, that is, they have a broadcast tower that sends out a signal that can be picked up by an antenna. However, most of our local channels are in San Francisco and we are just a little too far away to get a clear signal. As a general rule local channels do not have the ability to stream all of their content but several of them do make all or part of their local programming available. Channels 2, 4, 5, 7 and 11 all make their newscasts available for viewing. They have additional content as well such as full episodes of some shows and clips from other shows.

Standard cable channels make many, but not all of their programs available for streaming. The only way to know for sure is to go to the channels website and see if your favorites are available. Premium cable channels (HBO, Starz etc.) may make their content available for purchase but in many cases they require you to already have a cable package that includes their channel.

Sports is where it gets particularly sticky. Some sports are on national networks (CBS, ABC etc.), some are on cable channels (TNT, ESPN, MLBN, Fox Sports) and some are on proprietary channels such as Comcast Sports Net or Pac 12 Channel. Getting access to all of these outlets is complicated and less than satisfactory. All of the major leagues have their own packages that,

for a seasonal fee, allow you to view all out of market games. That means you can watch your favorite team when they are on the road but not when they are at home. Some networks only allow you to stream games if you have a cable channel subscription to the channel and others just aren't available at all. It is likely as cord cutting increases that more outlets will make their content available on a streaming basis.

What do I need to Cord Cut?

You will need a high speed broadband connection. Ideally you will communicate with your TV wirelessly so your modem must have Wi-Fi or you will need to add a wireless router.

If you have a Smart TV it should already have the ability to stream content. If you have an older TV you will need a set top box (a silly carry over term since no modern TV has anywhere that you could rest a box on) or other access method. There are a variety of boxes available with different features. You will need to know what sources you want to use to decide on the best box for you.

If you have a nearby laptop or computer you can use it as the source for your content and simply display it on your TV using something like a Chromecast device or a Miracast style device.

Will I actually save money?

Maybe. Depending on what services you use your monthly cost can be anywhere from almost nothing to hundreds of dollars per month subject to what you want to watch. Here are some sources and their fees. Those with monthly fees usually offer a discount for a year subscription.

Amazon Prime \$100/yr.

Netflix \$7.99/mo

Hulu \$7.99/mo

Acorn TV \$5.99/ mo.

CBS All Access \$5.99/ mo.

Sling TV \$20/ mo.

MLB TV \$24.99/mo. Or \$129.99/season

NFL \$39.99/mo.

NBA League Pass \$69-99/season

Additionally you can get single episodes of programs from many sources, usually for about \$1.99 per episode or \$19.99 for a season. Sources include:

iTunes

Amazon Instant Video

Google Play

You Tube

So, is it possible to cut the cord? If you are prepared to do a little extra work to find the shows you want to watch and are willing to put up with the limitations that not having a cable provider comes with the answer is yes.