

Cutting the Cord
How to Watch TV Without Cable

How to Watch TV Without Cable2

Attachment A: Choosing an Over-The-Air (OTA) Antenna8

Attachment B: Estimated Costs for Cutting the Cord.....9

How to Watch TV Without Cable

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Are you interested in information that may help you decide if you're ready to make the switch from cable or satellite television to internet-accessed (streaming) television? If yes, this article is intended to help you do just that, step-by-step.

Streaming comes in over the internet. You can use an external streaming device, e.g., Fire Stick, Roku, etc., plugged into your TV, or you can simply use a SMART TV. These two things are really the same.

There are three major steps to help you decide on whether cutting the cord is for you, followed by the instructions for completing each step.

1. Identify the channels you must have.
2. Identify the streaming platforms/providers that offer your programming.
3. Purchase equipment.

What is "cutting the cord?"
The term is used for anyone who cancels their cable or satellite subscription in favor of alternative options, such as streaming video services.

Step 1: Identify the channels you must have. Options:

- Scroll through your current programming or TV guide and note your favorites (must have vs. nice to have).
- Go to your cable provider's website and find their channel guide (or Google it).
- Go to CNET to view a list of the 100 top channels.
 - ★ Google **CNET compares** into the search box, or type the entire address in the navigation bar as follows:
https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1t0ZW8qC9ggVw5UZUiPmfGZdxndtcKjojSi_FYn0Fzw0/edit#gid=1551881764. This list will also be very useful when you want to compare streaming providers.
 - ★ If you are a spreadsheet user, you can download the file and use it to highlight your choices.

Channel	Philo (\$16)	Sling Orange (\$25)	Sling Blue (\$25)	DirectTV Now (\$40)	You (\$40)
Total channels:	32	23	34	60	
ABC	No	\$	\$	Yes	Yes
CBS	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Fox	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
NBC	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
A&E	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
AMC	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Animal Planet	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
BBC America	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
BBC World News	Yes	\$	\$	\$	Yes
BET	Yes	\$	Yes	Yes	No
Big Ten Network	No	No	No	\$	Yes
Bloomberg TV	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Boomerang	No	\$	\$	\$	No
Bravo	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cartoon Network/Adult Swim	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
CBS Sports Network	No	No	No	\$	Yes
Cheddar	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Cinemax	No	\$	\$	\$	No
CMT	Yes	\$	\$	Yes	No
CNBC	No	No	\$	Yes	Yes

Step 2: Identify the streaming platforms/providers that offer your programming.

Options:

- Go to each provider's website and review the channels offered. Keep in mind that if a "must have" channel is not included, you can sign up for more than one service. You may also have the option of downloading a single channel rather than buying a second package.
- You may find the CNET spreadsheet (Step 1 above) useful for identifying major providers. If not, google the provider website.

Tip: If you save the spreadsheet to your computer, you can add/delete provider info. as you wish.

Step 3: Purchase equipment.

- Modem/router. You may have a modem/router combination that you rent for a monthly fee from your cable provider. We recommend that you purchase them outright. Be aware that you need both. Some are combined into one unit; others are separate purchases.
- Unless you have a SMART TV, depending upon your provider choice(s), you may need to order a device to transfer the stream from the internet to your TV. This may be a small plug-in device. With this device installed, you can download many other channels, sometimes at an additional cost.
 - ★ Example 1: You decide you want to sign up for Sling TV. It has all the channels you want except for HGTV. You can add that channel for an additional monthly fee.
 - ★ Example 2: You sign up for Amazon TV and purchase an Amazon Fire Stick and remote. After signing in, you'll see that many other platforms/providers are listed. If an app is listed, then you can access it through the Fire Stick. (Same scenario if you purchase a Roku stick.)

- ★ If you don't have a SMART TV, make sure you have one or more available HDMI ports. Not sure? Look at the back of your TV. Ports may be on the back or side panel.
- ★ See more under **Choosing A Streaming Platform** on page 6.
- An additional optional purchase is an Over-The-Air (OTA) antenna. This will allow you to access local channels (ABC, CBS, NBC, PBS, etc.). Most antennas are inexpensive and easy to hook up. Helpful tips in assessing your antenna needs can be found on page 8 (Attachment A).

Another consideration for smooth streaming is internet speed. You pay for your water and electricity based on usage. For now, at least, you pay a flat rate for your internet. Your choice instead becomes how fast you want it to be. We see internet speeds in things like loading times. Slow internet isn't the only reason that your computer might struggle to load a website, but a faster internet connection will deliver the information faster.

For light internet browsing, you'll be able to get away with download speeds as low as 25 Mbps or less. But add more devices or start streaming stuff and you'll have to look for quicker download speeds. If you are watching Netflix in 720p or 1080p and on just one device, 25 Mbps is a minimum.

More simultaneous streaming (multiple TVs), or for 4K Ultra HD, you'll want 50 Mbps or more. Online gamers need to start at 100 Mbps. You should be able to find out your current internet speed on your provider's website. Another source is <http://www.speedtest.net/>.

UNDERSTANDING THE PROCESS

Cord-cutting can be as simple or as complicated as you want it to be. To be a cord cutter, all you need to do is call your cable or satellite provider and cancel. But what if you're just not sure it's the right move? One of the great things about cord-cutting is that you get to decide what to use to replace cable. You can choose one solution or mix and match—it's all up to you. But that means you need to figure out which direction you want to take with all of this.

Tips: Many service providers offer a free trial. You can keep cable while you try out these providers.

VIEWING OPTIONS

There are a lot of ways to watch TV without cable, but we find it easiest to sort nearly all solutions into three major categories:

- Streaming video on demand (SVOD) services
- Live TV streaming services
- Free over-the-air TV

Other than free over-the-air TV, these categories include a lot of different services. By grouping solutions like this, we can help you get a good grasp on what different types of cord-cutting solutions are available.

STREAMING VIDEO ON DEMAND (SVOD) SERVICES

This is the type of streaming service that you're probably most familiar with. Streaming video on demand (or SVOD) services are the ones that allow you to select a movie or TV show episode and watch it whenever you want; in other words, "on demand." Netflix is the most well-known SVOD service, but there are many more out there: Amazon, Hulu, and Crackle, to name just a few. Here's a list to get you started:

- **Netflix** – The oldest major SVOD service is still the one to beat. Netflix offers movies and TV shows from all different studios, but it has helped lead the charge in original content, too.
- **Amazon** – This e-commerce giant has paired its streaming offerings with its Amazon Prime subscription service. Along with movies, TV shows, and original series, you'll enjoy perks unrelated to streaming, like free two-day shipping on some items sold through the site. Amazon also acts as a broker for other streaming services: you can add HBO, or instance, to your Amazon account and stream it through Amazon's app. Amazon also offers a monthly subscription (non-Prime membership).

- **Hulu** – Hulu features ads unless you pay a bit more, but it also offers something its competitors can't: recent episodes of TV shows from seasons that are still ongoing. That makes its offerings a little more current than the competitions', though Hulu also has plenty of golden oldies. Hulu also offers a skinny bundle service – more on that later.
- **HBO** – You can get HBO through cable or – as we just mentioned – through Amazon. You can also get it through skinny bundles (more on those later). But HBO also offers a standalone streaming service under its HBO Now branding. Regardless of how you choose to subscribe, you'll be able to stream great content. HBO has been producing the best shows on cable for ages, so the fact that you can get it over the internet now is bad news for cable. Plus, HBO's shift to streaming has helped prompt the original series arms race that now includes Netflix, Amazon, and others.
- **Crackle** – Crackle is technically an "AVOD" service. That's just like SVOD, except that it's advertising-supported. And since it's ad-supported, Crackle is free! Don't expect Netflix-sized catalogs from the AVOD set, but do expect quality content for free. You will, of course, have to sit through ads to get it.
- **Tubi TV** – Tubi TV is another big AVOD service and works pretty much like Crackle. You can create a login even though Tubi TV is free; like most decent AVOD services (including Crackle), Tubi TV uses accounts to allow users to save watchlists and pick up streaming where they left off.

That's not an exhaustive list, but it's a great place to get started as you check out various SVOD services.

LIVE TV STREAMING SERVICES

Streaming video on demand is a great way to replace content from TV. You can watch your favorite shows and movies online whenever you want! But is that really the same thing as being able to watch TV without cable? To some people, sure – but others might find that their favorite things about TV are missing. What about brand-new episodes of the latest network TV shows? What about channel surfing and "just seeing what's on?" What about live sports?

These services offer the network TV channels you crave: ESPN, AMC, TBS, and a whole lot more. You can subscribe to premium channels like HBO through these same services (they're usually available as add-ons for a set price), and you'll also get major broadcast networks like ABC, CBS, Fox, and NBC – though the catch with those four is that they'll be available in select markets only. The major **skinny bundles** also offer a mix of regional sports networks (in their relevant markets only), meaning you may be able to cancel cable and still watch your favorite local professional and college sports teams. The best replacement for live cable TV is live streaming TV. And when we say "live streaming TV," we're talking, for the most part, about skinny bundles.

Skinny bundles offer the same live network channels that cable does, but they charge you less because they cut out the fat, allow you pay only for the channels you want, and deliver your content "over the top" instead of through cable. Once a fairly small part of the cord-cutting economy, skinny bundles are everywhere now.

Here are a few of the live TV streaming services you should know about.

Hulu with Live TV

Hulu with Live TV offers a package of channels for \$39.99 per month. It also includes access to on-demand content from Hulu's longstanding SVOD (subscription video on demand) service. The channel bundle offer includes CBS, Fox, and NBC (in select markets) as well as ESPN, so you'll be ready to watch all the NFL you want without cable if you grab yourself a Hulu with Live TV subscription.

Philo

Philo is a skinny bundle that was built with affordability in mind. You won't get local channels or sports channels on Philo, but those omissions allow the service to charge a stunningly affordable \$16-per-month subscription fee. A larger bundle option can up that to a still-amazing \$20 per month. You can test out Philo for a free one-week trial.

Sling TV

Sling TV offers two base packages. Sling Orange includes ESPN, and Sling Blue includes Fox and NBC. The base bundles cost \$25 per month each, or you can get both together for \$40 per month. Sling TV also offers “Extras,” which are add-on bundles of channels. “Sports Extra,” a \$5-per-month option, is one that might appeal to NFL fans. Unfortunately, Sling TV doesn’t have CBS. It does, however, have a great free trial program.

fuboTV

fuboTV markets itself as a great skinny bundle choice for sports fans, and it does a reasonable job of making NFL games available to cord-cutters. fuboTV still has a definite sports bent, but it also has channels for news, entertainment, movies, and more. Base bundles are “fubo” (\$44.99 per month) and “fubo Extra” (\$49.99 per month), and some add-ons are available, too. Get your first month of fuboTV at a discount, and they also offer a free trial.

PlayStation Vue offers subscribers a choice of a few different bundles arranged in tiers. The cheapest, which is the \$44.99-per-month Access bundle, is all you’ll need to watch the NFL without cable: you’ll get CBS, Fox, and NBC (in select markets) in that package, and ESPN is tucked in there, too. You can upgrade your bundle to pricier ones if you’d like, and PlayStation Vue is also one way to get NFL RedZone – a channel that is particularly hard to access without cable. That makes PlayStation Vue a fantastic answer to the question of how to watch NFL games without cable. Try it out for free for five days.

DirecTV Now

DirecTV Now offers several different skinny bundle options. The cheapest, Live a Little, costs \$40 per month and includes all of the channels we need in order to watch the NFL without cable: CBS, Fox, and NBC (each in select markets), plus ESPN. You can choose a larger bundle if you’d like – all of DirecTV Now’s bigger bundles include the channels from their smaller counterparts, plus some new ones – and whatever bundle you choose, you can snag a free week-long trial.

CBS All Access

CBS All Access is a service aimed at CBS superfans. For \$5.99 per month, fans get access to on-demand content from CBS. A CBS All Access subscription will give subscribers in select markets access to a live feed of their local CBS station (with ads). Pay \$9.99 per month for a version without ads. A free trial offer is available.

YouTube TV is a great choice for cord-cutters who find themselves covered by the service’s still-ongoing region-by-region rollout. YouTube TV offers CBS, Fox, and NBC in select markets, and it also has ESPN in its lone bundle option. That bundle will cost you \$40 per month and comes loaded with features like unlimited cloud DVR space and great content discovery features. You can check out YouTube TV by signing up for the service’s free trial offer.

As with the SVOD services, this isn’t an exhaustive list, but these are the live TV streaming services that we know and love best. The best video streaming services, according to **PC Magazine** (August 2018):

										
	Hulu	Sling TV	CBS All Access	fuboTV	Amazon Video	Philo	Netflix	HBO Now	DirecTV NOW	YouTube TV
Editor's Rating	●●●●○ EDITORS' CHOICE	●●●●○ EDITORS' CHOICE	●●●●○	●●●●○	●●●●○	●●●●○	●●●●○ EDITORS' CHOICE	●●●●○	●●●●○	●●●●○
Monthly Starting Price	\$7.99	\$20	\$5.99	\$44.99	\$8.99	\$16	\$7.99	\$14.99	\$40	\$40
★ Concurrent	1	1-4	2	2-3	2	3	1-4	Unlimited	2	3
Live TV	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓			✓	✓
Orig. Programming	✓		✓		✓		✓	✓		
Ads	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓			✓	✓

*The number of TVs (or media devices) that can access one subscription.

FREE OVER-THE-AIR (OTA) TV

Free over-the-air TV is one of the most powerful tools in any cord-cutter's arsenal. With nothing more than an antenna and a TV, you can pick up broadcast stations in your area, including CBS, Fox, and NBC, to name a few. And today, OTA is broadcast in HD.

You can even turn your OTA setup into a streaming one with the aid of an OTA DVR or a PC TV tuner. With this strategy, you can do something that even skinny bundles won't let you do: stream NFL games free online, legally.

Choosing a Streaming Platform

Let's get to know the platforms. Once we've done that, we'll move on to discussing what to look for in a specific device. That second part will be a whole lot less daunting if you've already narrowed down which product lines you'll be looking for, so give this list of major streaming platforms a quick read-through:

- **Roku** – Roku has a massive app library (they call them “channels”), a very simple user interface, and a nice range of price points.
- **Fire TV** – Amazon's platform is ideal for Amazon Prime members, although anyone can purchase a monthly subscription. Amazon creates original content and has a large library of television series and movies.
- **Apple TV** – Apple TV is just what you'd expect from Apple: it's simple, beautiful, works wonderfully, and costs a good deal more than most of the competition.
- **Android TV** – Android TV is a highly customizable platform, and it appears in various forms on all kinds of devices. You'll spot it on some Sony SMART TVs and the Nvidia Shield, among others. It offers a robust app library that includes better gaming options than most streaming platforms can offer.
- **Chromecast** – Chromecast devices work a little differently than their competition. With Chromecast, you choose what to watch on some other device, then sling the screen on up to your TV. So with the itty-bitty Chromecast dongle plugged into your TV, you'd then turn to your laptop, smartphone, tablet, or other device and fire up Netflix or whatever else you want to watch. Then, with the touch of a button, you could put the stream up onto the TV. It's affordable and simple, but the drawback is that it's a bit harder to collaborate with others when choosing what to watch.

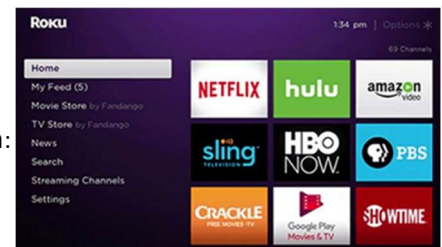
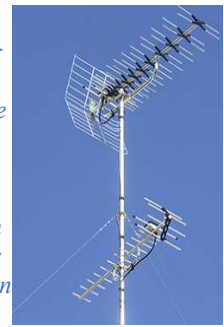
Choosing Your Device

None of this platform-focused talk is meant to imply that it doesn't matter whether you spend \$35 on a streaming device or \$200, nor that it doesn't matter whether you choose an external device or a SMART TV. But thinking about platforms first is a helpful way to narrow down your options, because – as you'll see in a moment – **each of these platforms offers a lineup of its own**, which means you'd be dealing with an awful lot of choices if you didn't first take some out of the running.

With some idea of what sort of platform you'd prefer, things get easier fast. For instance, if you're looking for simplicity and user-friendliness, you might focus on just Roku and Apple TV devices, and not bother to research Fire TV, Chromecast, or Android TV. But what do you look for when you're researching your device? Here are a few key questions to consider:

- **Do you want to rely on Wi-Fi?** Some pricier streaming devices allow you use an Ethernet cable to connect to the internet. If your router is in a convenient spot, and depending on how reliable your Wi-Fi is, you may want to take this path to smoother streaming. Wired connections are faster and more reliable than Wi-Fi.
- **Do you want a SMART TV?** SMART TVs are convenient all-in-one solutions. But some of the platforms not mentioned above are less elegant than the ones we listed. Buying a separate streaming box means you can upgrade your TV and streaming devices at different times, which could be convenient or not, depending on your situation and finances.

This is an outdoor antenna--but fear not: suburban and urban residents will likely be able to watch TV without cable using a small indoor antenna, which should fit much more nicely with your living room decor than this one.



Above is a snapshot of the Roku menu. Having a Roku TV, or purchasing the Roku Stick to plug into your TV, allows access to many subscription options. For example, if you wish to subscribe to Netflix, select that icon and follow the instructions. (A little easier to access on your PC/tablet; you'll be entering lots of numbers, which can be cumbersome on a remote.)

- **Do you want to be able to stream in 4K?** There are 4K smart TVs and streaming devices that can work with 4K content and TVs, but they are going to cost you more than ones that top out at 1080p.

- **What's your budget?**

- Low-cost streaming devices tend to take the form of small dongles that plug into TV HDMI ports. They rely exclusively on Wi-Fi and have weaker Wi-Fi antennas and processors. These can cost as little as \$35 or so. Examples: Roku Express, Chromecast, Amazon Fire.



- Spend \$40 to \$60 or so and you'll get a beefier streaming device with a more powerful Wi-Fi antenna. Examples: Roku Stick, Amazon Fire TV Stick.

- SMART TVs – A smart TV is going to cost you more than a streaming stick because, well, it's a TV, too. But a SMART TV with a great platform can be an awesome choice. Be a little wary of lesser-known platforms. They can be clumsy to use, and if you're not actually using your SMART TV's smartness, that's a waste (and might lead you to buy one of the devices above in the end anyway).

Another important consideration: the bigger the streaming platform, the better the app selection. You can watch Netflix on anything, but support for smaller SVOD services and skinny bundles is a bit rarer. Last but not least, it's worth noting that fans of simplicity who are planning to use an OTA antenna to watch TV without cable may find they prefer SMART TVs, since the input selection will be built in and everything can be handled with one remote (by contrast, using an OTA antenna and a separate streaming device will mean using the TV remote to watch OTA TV and the streaming device remote to stream – and the TV remote again to switch between the two inputs). Examples: Sony SMART TVs (many run the Android TV platform), Roku TVs (manufactured by TCL and others), Fire TV Edition TVs (manufactured by Element).

The examples here aren't exhaustive, but they'll help you get a sense of where the tiers are with these products. Pick a platform and a tier (or two), and you'll have narrowed your research considerably.

Putting It All Together

So there you have it, folks: that's how to watch TV without cable. Canceling cable is the easy part; replacing your content doesn't have to be so hard! Let's recap:

You'll replace your content:

- Streaming video on demand services like Netflix will give you movies and previously aired episodes of TV shows.
- Live TV streaming services or "skinny bundles" like Sling TV will give you live network television channels like ESPN.
- Free over-the-air TV will give you live broadcast television channels like ABC, CBS, Fox, NBC, and PBS.

Then you'll put that content on your TV:

- You can simply plug your antenna into your TV (don't forget to scan for channels).
- You can put your streaming services on your TV with a streaming device: choose a platform and a device--either an external and HDMI-connected device or an all-in-one SMART TV solution--and get streaming!

Final tip: *Keep a list of passwords associated with each provider and equipment near your remote. You'll need them!*

Choosing an Over-The-Air (OTA) Antenna

TV's Biggest Channels Are Free – If You Know How to Get Them

Why are you paying for cable when the channels are free? Well, not all of them are free. But we're not kidding you: in many areas, major networks are free over the air. All you need is an antenna – you know, those rabbit-ear things that you always see in old photos and TV shows? They may look old-fashioned, but they're a must-buy for any cord cutter who wants to reclaim major network programming.



What You Get

No, you won't get 3,000 channels over the air. The Food Network doesn't have local programming, so there's no reason for them to have a broadcast station in every city. But certain channels – like CBS, NBC, Fox, and ABC – usually do have local stations, and that means that they're often available for free over the air.

Your mileage may vary, of course, but you can get an idea of which channels are within range for you by using an online tool. Go to www.nocable.org and enter your zip code. Tools like this can also give you a simple measure of your distance from local stations, helping you to figure out which type of antenna you need. Also included is a TV antenna comparison guide.

So what kind of TV antenna do you need? Well, that all depends on where you live. City dwellers like Tampa, Miami and Orlando are likely to have their own local broadcasts of CBS, NBC, and the rest of the major channels coming from nearby and can therefore get by with a small indoor antenna. Suburbanites (like Port Charlotte and Punta Gorda) might have to spring for a bigger outdoor antenna.

If the broadcast stations are within 22 miles from your location, the signal should be strong enough that you can use an indoor omnidirectional antenna. If the distance is greater than that, you may need to buy an outdoor antenna and it should be at least 30 feet above the ground to get good reception.

Find Your Local Broadcasts' Local Transmitter Map

With an antenna, of course, you're getting local broadcasts instead of national ones. That means local affiliates of big-time channels like CBS and ABC – you know, the ones that employ your local news anchors and put billboards up on the freeways. Channels that offer identical programming nationwide (like AMC) won't be free over the air, but channels that change things up from place to place (like FOX) likely will. You can also expect channels like Univision and PBS.

These local channels are broadcasting from big towers somewhere near you. So your next step is to find out where your local broadcasters have set up shop, and how far that is from you. Luckily, there are multiple sites that will do this job for you. One site is: **Antennas Direct** at <https://www.antennasdirect.com/transmitter-locator.html>. Just enter your zip code to see a map. Scroll over a black dot to identify the station name/call letters. Scroll down to view a list of stations by distance and how strong the signal will be by the time it reaches you. Then you'll have the option to view the type of antenna that will work best for your location.

1.	1. Current monthly cost for cable plan (TV & internet)	
2.	2. How much monthly would you pay for internet only?	
3.	3. Select streaming services to subscribe to:	
4.	<i>Enter monthly cost of your selections in this column</i>	
5.		↓

6.	Provider	Per Month	Cost
7.	Amazon Prime	\$8.99	
8.	CBS All Access	\$5.99	
9.	DirectTV Now		
10.	• Live a Little	\$40.00	
11.	• Just Right	\$55.00	
12.	• Go Big	\$65.00	
13.	• Gotta Have It	\$75.00	
14.	fuboTV	\$45.00	
15.	fuboExtra	\$50.00	
16.	HBO Now	\$14.99	
17.	Hulu	\$11.99	
18.	Hulu with Live TV	\$39.99	
19.	MLB.TV	\$9.99	
20.	NBA League Pass	\$17.99	
21.	Netflix	\$13.99	
22.	NHL.TV	\$24.99	
23.	PlayStation Vue		
24.	• Access	\$44.99	
25.	• Core	\$49.99	
26.	• Elite	\$54.99	
27.	• Ultra	\$79.99	
28.	Sling TV		
29.	• Orange	\$25.00	
30.	• Blue	\$25.00	
31.	• Orange + Blue	\$40.00	
32.	Services you would like to add not listed above		
33.	•		
34.	•		
35.	•		

Estimated Costs for Cutting the Cord

Information provided regarding provider pricing is current as of 10/31/18.

36.	Total Estimated Streaming Services		Total lines 7 through 35
37.	Internet only (item #2 above)		
38.	Total Proposed Monthly Cost		Total lines 36 & 37
39.	Item #1 above (current cable/internet bill)		
40.	Monthly savings		Subtract line 39 from lines 38
41.	Annualized savings		Multiply line 40 x 12 (months)

43. External Equipment (one time purchases)			
44.		Examples	Actual
45.	Modem ¹	\$60.00	
46.	Router ¹	\$70.00	
47.	Amazon Fire Stick ²	\$25.00	
48.	Roku Stick ²	\$54.00	
49.	OTA Antenna	\$25.00	
50.	Total One-Time Exp.	\$234.00	

¹ Purchase a modem/router combination for \$100-\$150; make sure it is compatible.

² It is unlikely you will need to purchase both a Roku stick and an Amazon Fire stick.