

Watching Film and TV over the Internet

Please note that the suggestions and recommendations in this document are the personal opinions of the author(s)(See last page), and neither they nor B4RN can take any responsibility for the consequences of any actions you may (or may not) take as a result of reading this document!

Introduction

Having a fast broadband service allows you to use services that “stream” directly over your broadband connection to watch TV shows and films. What’s more, a gigabit connection (such as offered by B4RN) can easily stream movies and TV at very high picture quality, and allow you and your family to watch different content at the same time (not on the same device, obviously!)



Streaming services allow you to watch content not only on your TV but also on your computer, laptop, tablet and mobile phone - and you get to choose what to watch and when you want to watch it, otherwise known as “video on demand”. Some services allow you to download content onto your device to watch later so you can, for example, download a movie to your tablet from Netflix to watch on a flight where streaming services are unavailable.





This document contains a list of popular streaming services, what they offer, their typical price and brief descriptions of how you can access them. As you’ll see, even if you subscribed to several services you can still end up paying far less than you would for a satellite TV subscription, yet end up with more choice! For example, a Sky TV package that includes the Sky Cinema and Sky Sports channels will cost you in excess of £60 per month and you are tied in to an 18 month contract. In comparison, you could subscribe to Netflix, Amazon, Disney+ and BT Sport and still only pay around £48 per month and not be tied in to any contract.

The streaming services market is currently (Autumn 2020) undergoing a great deal of turmoil as media companies compete for a larger share of the market. Sadly, this means more complication and expense for the viewer as more services are set up and content moves from one service to another. Fortunately, few of these services require a contract longer than monthly, making changing quite straightforward, although you may find yourself having to subscribe to 2 or 3 of them.

Streaming Services

This is a list of some of the more popular streaming services available. There are hundreds of others, and most Smart TVs and the devices suggested lower down can access any of them. You access a directory of available services and add the ones you want to watch to a “favourites” list.

| Streaming Service | Comments | Price |
|---|--|--|
|  | <p>Massive range of films, boxed sets and tv shows plus lots of original content.</p> <p>Some content can be downloaded onto tablets/phones so it can be watched offline.</p> <p>More expensive options allow the use of multiple devices on the account.</p> | <p>£8.99 per month to watch in HD quality.</p> <p>£11.99 per month to watch in 4K quality.</p> |
|  | <p>Annual subscription includes the following features:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Massive range of films, boxed sets and tv shows plus lots of original content. • Free next day delivery on thousands of products ordered through Amazon (Note; not everything you buy on Amazon is eligible for free delivery.) • Unlimited storage of digital photos (a great way to back up your photos) • Access to listen to over 2 million songs through Amazon music. • Access to over 1000 e-books, magazines and comics. | <p>£79 per year or £7.99 per month.</p> <p>(Note that there is an additional charge for watching much of the content on Amazon Video, usually around £3 or £4 per item.)</p> |

| | | |
|---|--|---|
|  | <p>Launched in March 2020 and great for families, the Disney+ service offers EVERY Disney movie and TV show that exists - this also includes the Marvel, Pixar and Star Wars film franchises as well as the National Geographic channel and HBO.</p> | <p>£5.99 per month or £60 per year.</p> |
|  | <p>Launched in the UK in 2019 - this is a joint venture between BBC and ITV to try and rival the likes of Netflix and Amazon - this service offers classic British TV Shows and films.</p> | <p>£5.99 per month</p> |
|  | <p>This service is actually owned by Sky TV - it offers a range of "Passes" that give you access to different types of content with no contract - you can pick and choose what passes you'd like and just pay a monthly fee. It effectively allows you to only pay for the bits of Sky TV you like without paying for all the bits you never watch - no satellite dish needed!</p> | <p>"Entertainment Pass" Access to over 300 boxed sets from various Sky channels. £8.99 per month</p> <p>"Sky Cinema Pass" Access to over 1000 movies from Sky Cinema. £11.99 per month</p> <p>"Kids Pass" Access to thousands of ad-free childrens shows. £3.99 per month</p> <p>"Sky Sports Pass" Access to 11 Sky Sports channels. £33.99 per month</p> |
|  | <p>Offers a range of sports to watch including EVERY Premier League football match</p> | <p>£25 per month. No contract - cancel whenever you want. All sports are streamed in 4K picture quality.</p> |

How do you get “streaming” content onto your TV?

You need one of two things; Either a “Smart” TV or if you don’t have a Smart TV, a device to plug into the TV; what used to be called a “Set Top Box” (although these days, they don’t go on top of the set and nor are they a box!)





What are “Smart” TVs?

A “smart” TV is simply a term used to describe a modern TV that is capable of directly connecting to the internet via your router (usually via WiFi but can also be via an Ethernet cable). Smart TVs often have certain streaming services built in to them for convenience, and you can generally add others. For example, some TV remote controls have a “Netflix” button and pressing it will immediately display the Netflix menu listing all the movies and tv shows available for viewing (assuming you have already set up a subscription to the service which can generally only be done from another device, e.g., computer, tablet or ‘phone). If you buy a TV today it will almost certainly have the built-in ability to connect to the internet, giving you the ability to enjoy any of the streaming services listed above.

I don’t have a Smart TV - what can I do?

Even if your TV is a few years old and cannot directly connect to the internet, you can purchase a device that plugs into both the TV and connects to the Internet. Unfortunately this means you end up with yet another remote control, but it saves you having to buy a new TV. These devices plug into an “HDMI” socket on the TV; if your TV is very old, it may not have any of these, and will probably have something called a “SCART” socket. You can buy HDMI to SCART converters, but they are of variable quality, and I would recommend that you only consider one of them as a last resort. (See the later section on jargon for an explanation of what all this stuff means!) Some streaming devices (e.g., Roku) need to be facing you so the infra-red remote control will work, others can be hidden away behind the TV. Some of them can be integrated with voice assistants (Siri, Alexa, Google Assistant), others just use a standard TV-style remote control.

You have a wide choice of devices you can use to connect your TV to the Internet. Here is a small selection (prices correct as of September 2020);

| Device & Manufacturer | Comments | Cost |
|---|--|---|
| <p>Google Chromecast</p>  | <p>Plugs into an HDMI socket on the TV, communicates via the router over WiFi, so you need a good WiFi signal where your TV is located.</p> | <p>£30</p> <p>https://store.google.com/gb/product/chromecast</p> |
| <p>Roku Express, Premiere or Streaming Stick</p>  | <p>Different models have HD or 4K, plus more features, e.g. voice remote.</p> | <p>From £30 to £50, depending on model</p> <p>https://www.roku.com/en-gb/how-it-works</p> |
| <p>Apple TV</p>  | <p>Despite the name, this is not a TV, but a set top box; you still need a TV. I would only consider one of these if your household is keen on Apple hardware, since it integrates well with other Apple equipment, e.g., you can use Siri to control it.</p> | <p>£140</p> <p>https://www.apple.com/uk/tv/</p> |
| <p>Amazon Firestick, FireCube</p>  | <p>Different models have HD or 4K, plus more features, e.g. voice remote and integration with Alexa.</p> | <p>From £30 to £110, depending on model.</p> <p>https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/B079QB9BD7</p> |

What about other devices (tablets, phones, computers)?

Generally speaking, each streaming service provides an app in the relevant app store. Download and install the app, log onto your account and you can watch content on your device, where network speeds support it. Be careful; streaming video over a mobile data connection can cost you a lot of money. Use WiFi instead.

You can watch Netflix natively (that is, you don't need to install any other software) in the Google Chrome browser. Just go to <http://www.netflix.com> and log on to your account.

What does all this jargon mean?

HDMI?

"HDMI" stands for "High Definition Multimedia Interface" and is the current popular standard for connecting TVs and other video devices together. It also allows devices to issue commands to one another so, for example, your streaming device can switch the TV on (and off), and switch the TV's input to itself. An HDMI connector/cable looks like this;



There's a great deal of bunkum talked about HDMI cables (and indeed, audiovisual cables of all kinds), so don't pay a lot of money for them; anything that's long enough and from a reputable retailer will do. Fortunately, there's only one kind of connector at the moment, so it's hard to buy the wrong kind and they will only fit in the socket one way round!

SCART?

SCART is an obsolete standard for connecting TVs and other video devices together. No reasonably modern TV will have it. It uses gigantic, unreliable, multi-pin connectors that look like this;



The only reason you may get involved with SCART is if your TV is more than about 10 years old, in which case it may have them instead of HDMI connectors. All streaming

devices have HDMI, in which case you might consider using a SCART to HDMI adapter. I do not recommend this solution, since the picture quality will be poor, there are many different kinds of incompatible SCART cables (which all look the same) and the adapters are, in my experience, not very reliable. Setting one up is beyond the scope of this document, and if you have a TV that uses SCART, I suggest you banish it to the spare bedroom and buy a new TV.

What's the difference between HD, 4K, 8K ?

HD stands for "High Definition". It gives you sharper picture quality and has become pretty much the standard way to view movies and TV these days.

A 4K image just improves things again - for each pixel (dot) that makes up an HD image - a 4K image will split each dot into 4 smaller dots - thus allowing you to see even more detail. Most of today's streaming services now offer the ability to view 4K movies and if you buy a new Smart TV today it will probably support 4K. Certainly if you have a gigabit broadband service and you are looking to get a new TV you should be thinking of getting one that supports 4K because that will become the norm in the near future.

You can buy TVs that support an even higher resolution called 8K but I would recommend against it. They are very expensive, no-one is broadcasting content in 8K and none of the streaming services support it. While the picture quality in 4K is noticeably better than HD, some people cannot tell the difference between 4K and 8K. Note that the demos in TV retailers are set up to flatter the differences between 4K and 8K and should be taken with a pinch of salt.

Buying a new TV

(Beware; Personal opinions follow!)

If you are in the market for a new TV, bear the following things in mind;

- Get a 4K set
- Choose the set with best picture quality you can – bear in mind my earlier point that manufacturer's demos flatter to deceive. Ignore the "New technology" (e.g. OLED) hype and choose with your own eyes
- Don't go too big; you should be sitting no closer than about twice as far from the set as its size (i.e. 120" from a 60" set)
- Curved screens are a gimmick
- Budget for a sound bar – the sound from most flat screen TVs is poor, because there's nowhere to put the speakers inside them
- Choose a set with as many HDMI inputs as possible
- Bear in mind that much of the software in "Smart" TVs is very poor, and that manufacturers drop support for some services, so you'll probably end up buying one of the "set top boxes" described above in time. Don't worry, you can use your existing accounts on the streaming services.