# Netflix and beyond: new ways to watch TV, movies

The Associated Press

The DVD-by-mail service Netflix built its business on will soon be known as Qwickster. The rebranding follows Netflix's decision to split its DVD rental business from its online streaming service, a move that raised the prices for customers who want both by as much as 60 percent.

Netflix and the newly-minted Qwikster have a growing list of competitors that offer movies and TV shows streamed online, on DVDs, or through on-demand cable TV. Choosing the right service will depend on your appetite for video. Do you want the latest movies or the greatest classics? Would you prefer cheap or better on-the-go access?

Of the online options, Netflix has the most content available for streaming over the Internet, though cable TV providers have pay-per-view options with a better selection of recent movies. Apple and Amazon, meanwhile, let you rent a la carte if you don't want to commit to a monthly plan but want the latest movies.

Here's a look at some of the options out there:

— Amazon's Instant Video

Amazon.com Inc.'s service offers thousands of movies and TV show episodes for online rental. Rental prices range from $1 to $5. There is no Netflix-like monthly subscription plan, so this option is best if you're looking for an a la carte plan that lets you pick what you want to watch. You'll have access to a video for one to seven days once you begin watching.

Amazon is offering free movie streaming to shoppers who pay $79 a year for a Prime membership, which offers free two-day shipping and discounts on next-day shipping. The selection of movies, though, is much smaller than Netflix's. Amazon offers roughly 6,000 movies and TV shows for streaming over an Internet connection for its Prime subscribers. By contrast, Netflix offers more than 20,000.

With Amazon, you can stream movies and shows on computers or on TV sets using a compatible, Internet-connected device such as a Blu-ray player or a set-top box from the likes of Sony, Panasonic, TiVo or Logitech.

— Apple iTunes

Renting movies through Apple Inc.'s iTunes is another pay-per-view option to access the latest dramas, comedies or TV shows. You can rent regular or high-definition flicks and watch them on an iPhone, iPad, computer or TV set using an Apple TV set-

top box.

Apple lets you rent first-run, high-definition movies the day they come out on DVD for $5 each, though most movies cost $3 or $4. TV shows are generally $1. You can watch rentals for a day or two from when you start playing them.

As with Amazon, renting movies through Apple is a good option if you want the latest releases as soon as possible. There are thousands of movies available, though iTunes doesn't have as many obscure, indie flicks as Netflix's streaming library. But, if you watch just a few shows or movies a month, it might be a cheaper option.

—Blockbuster

Under the new ownership of Dish Network Corp., Blockbuster has shifted to per-day pricing to better compete against Redbox and others. Just-released movies were lowered to $3 for the first day. Other new movies are $2 for the first day. Additional days are $1. These prices apply to DVD rentals as well as movies rented online.

Blockbuster offers no monthly streaming plan. Its DVD-by-mail subscriptions are pricier than Netflix's — $12 a month for one movie or video game at a time or $17 for unlimited two-at-a-time rentals. Netflix's DVD-only plan is $8 per month for one and $12 for two.

You can still return discs to any of Blockbuster's 1,700 remaining stores, if you have one nearby, and exchange them for new ones. You can also download Blockbuster movies to your compatible PC, tablet or smartphone. The company says movies available for download often accessible long before they are at Netflix.

Blockbuster makes sense if you live near its stores and prefer DVDs to streaming.

— Cable

For those who don't want to cancel their cable service, cable TV providers such as Comcast and Time Warner offer on-demand options to their monthly subscribers.

Time Warner charges $5 for a new movie release and $2 for older movies. Other cable TV companies have similar pricing. Movies are sometimes free, including those that come with a subscription to HBO or other premium channels.

Of course, you need monthly cable service. The average cost of Comcast Inc.'s basic package is about $60 for TV service, about 100 digital channels, music channels, video on demand and XfinityTV.com. Time Warner Cable Inc.'s average monthly package also runs about $60 and gives access to more than 100 channels.

Comcast gets movies often on the same day they are available on DVD and says many of its indie films are available as soon as they come out in theaters. That makes it an option if you can pony up a bigger monthly subscription fee and value seeing recently released films. Being a subscriber also gives you access to its

offerings online and on the iPad and iPhone.

Time Warner Cable has a catalog of about 10,000 movies. It also gets movies the same day they come out on DVD, giving it more recent content than Netflix streaming. Time Warner Cable has an iPad app and you can watch its content inside your home —though not at coffee shops or other public places— with Wi-Fi.

— Hulu and Hulu Plus

Parent companies including The Walt Disney Co., News Corp. and Comcast Corp. are looking to sell the online video service, but that hasn't stopped it from offering thousands of TV show episodes and movies to its viewers.

Besides a free option, Hulu Plus subscribers can pay $8 per month for more content, high-definition viewing and access on the iPad and newer-model iPhones, as well as video game consoles and high-end TV sets from Samsung, Sony or others.

Hulu's content skews more toward TV shows than movies, though both are available. It's a good option for those looking to watch shows such as the "Daily Show," ''Family Guy" or "The Office."

Both Hulu and Hulu Plus show advertisements, though on Hulu Plus there are movies available without commercial interruption.

— Netflix (new, streaming-only plan)

After the company's rebranding takes effect in a few weeks, Netflix will refer only to the company's online streaming plan, which costs $8 a month. Subscribers get access to Netflix's trove of more than 20,000 movies and TV shows. In a blog post late Sunday, CEO Reed Hastings also promised "substantial" additional streaming content coming in the next few months.

— Qwikster

This the "old" Netflix under a new name. Qwikster will offer online DVD rentals, shipped to you in the red envelopes Netflix has become known for. The prices are unchanged from July, when Netflix announced it was separating its streaming and DVD rental plans. To have one DVD out at a time, subscribers will pay $8 a month. Two DVDs at a time cost $12 per month.

— Redbox

Redbox, a unit of Coinstar Inc., has more than 27,000 bright-red DVD kiosks in grocery stores, drugstores and elsewhere around the U.S. Customers can rent DVDs for $1 per night. Blu-ray movies are available for $1.50 per night.

Depending on how many movies you watch, this could be a cheaper option than Netflix, but the options are more limited. Each kiosk holds 200 newly-released titles, which are updated every Tuesday.

Through concessions with Hollywood studios, Redbox has agreed to delay renting titles from Universal, Warner Bros. and Fox until nearly a month after the DVD versions go on sale. Netflix's DVD plan has similar restrictions.

With its budget-conscious, family-friendly approach, Redbox is a good option for hurried families looking to pick up a movie on the way home from the grocery store.

— Vudu, from Wal-Mart

Walmart.com offers streaming movies and TV shows through Vudu.com, the video streaming site it bought nearly two years ago. Many movies are available for streaming a la carte, the same day they come out on DVD. Renting cost $1 to $6 and buying movies costs $5 and up. There are no monthly subscription plans.

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