**Rethink costs before cutting cable cord**

[Gallaga, Omar L](http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.trident.edu:2048/indexinglinkhandler/sng/au/Gallaga%2C%2BOmar%2BL/%24N?accountid=28844). [**The Atlanta Journal - Constitution**](http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.trident.edu:2048/pubidlinkhandler/sng/pubtitle/The%2BAtlanta%2BJournal%2B-%2BConstitution/%24N/26032/DocView/1535400562/fulltext/%24B/1?accountid=28844) [Atlanta, Ga] 15 June 2014: E.14.

For people who watch a lot of television (let's admit it --- most of us), it's becoming a kind of annual ritual.

As soon as some of the major broadcast and cable TV shows wind up their regular season runs and summer creeps in, many of us take a look at our cable or satellite TV bill and ask, "Really? This is what I'm going to pay to watch TV during the off-season?" We may be tempted to cut the cord.

But does that make sense? Will you actually save money or just complicate your life and add stress over the stuff you're missing? You might be acting preemptively.

Cable giant [Comcast](http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.trident.edu:2048/docview/1535400562?pq-origsite=summon) is buying [Time Warner Cable](http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.trident.edu:2048/docview/1535400562?pq-origsite=summon), and AT&T just announced its intention to purchase DirecTV. Consolidation of the telecom / TV industry is worrying some viewers enough to make them reconsider where their TV money goes.

For those considering cord-cutting, there's great news and not-so-great news. The great news is that there's more hardware, online services and free TV shows online available than ever before. About 40 million Americans use such tools to watch online TV, according to NPD Group Inc.'s latest Connected Home report.

The bad news is that no streaming set-top box or online service is going to give you everything you may want if you're a voracious TV viewer with broad interests. Also, summer TV has gotten pretty great; it's no longer a dumping ground of reruns and bad reality shows.

But it's good to have options, right? Let's take a look at what's available.

A popular way for cord cutters (or people who just want additional stuff to watch) to view programming on their TV is with a streaming video box such as [Apple](http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.trident.edu:2048/docview/1535400562?pq-origsite=summon) TV, Roku or Amazon's recently introduced Fire TV.

Each has its advantages and disadvantages.

Apple TV ($99)

Popular, easy to use and a great way to stream photos and videos wirelessly if you have an iPhone or iPad. Apple TV offers HBO Go, YouTube, access to Netflix (with a paid subscription), PBS, [ESPN](http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.trident.edu:2048/docview/1535400562?pq-origsite=summon) and lots more, plus access to anything you've got via iTunes. It's missing Showtime Anytime, Amazon Instant Video and Redbox Instant. It's due for an upgrade soon from Apple.

Roku ($50-$99)

Versatile and in some cases cheaper than its competitors depending on what model you get. It can play a limited number of video games if you opt for the Roku 3 model.

Cheaper models can connect to older non-high-definition TVs, something Apple TV and Fire TV can't do. It's missing iTunes but has the largest selection of online channels of any mainstream streaming box, including HBO Go, Amazon Instant Video, PBS, Disney Channel and much more. One great feature: It allows you to search for programs across many different services.

Amazon Fire TV ($99)

A new player that will probably improve over time. It boasts voice controls (which only work in certain places), the option to play video games and access to HBO Go, Netflix, Showtime Anytime and Amazon's growing Instant Video library. Video quality is said to be great, but reviews were mixed upon its debut.

Streaming sticks

Chromecast ($35) and Roku Streaming Stick ($49): USB thumb drive-sized sticks that plug into your HDTV and offer a lot of the same kind of video streaming. Roku's model is essentially the same as its boxes, but Chromecast requires a device (laptop, phone or tablet) to grab online video to beam to the stick. Chromecast is not the easiest or most evolved streaming device to use, but its price makes it very attractive on a budget, even as a secondary device in a cord cutter's arsenal.

Programming

In order to replace the TV programs you'd normally get with a cable or satellite subscription, you can go several different routes. You might subscribe to a service such as Netflix ($8.99 a month), which allows you to watch movies and TV shows on practically any connected device, from a game console (Xbox 360 or One, PlayStation 3 or 4, Nintendo Wii or Wii U, to name a few), smart TV, phone, tablet or the devices mentioned above.

Netflix is the biggest of the streaming media services with about 35.7 million subscribers in the U.S. It offers original shows you can't get on any other service such as "House of Cards," but for day-to-day TV viewing, you're not going to find current episodes of anything until months or years after they're on television.

Hulu is more current-TV focused, but only offers a limited number of episodes per series, and it changes from week to week; often only four or five current episodes of a series such as "The Simpsons" are available. Hulu Plus ($7.99 a month) has more to offer but still features commercials in its programming. Hulu and Hulu Plus are both available on a wide range of devices.

Aereo has made a lot of noise as an $8-a-month option for watching local channels from your home area on a laptop or other device.

It works like a DVR, allowing you to record up to 20 hours of television to watch anytime. It's ideal for sports, news and live shows such as the Academy Awards from the major broadcasters.

But you're not going to get programming from cable channels such as [AMC](http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.trident.edu:2048/docview/1535400562?pq-origsite=summon), HBO or FX. And an ongoing legal battle means its future is uncertain, but for now you could hook up a laptop to a TV and use this service to have a virtual DVR or local programming.

And, let's mention the elephant in the room: Many people find sites online that allow them to illegally download episodes of TV series that are file-shared or streamed on shady websites for a subscription fee. "Game of Thrones," for example, is the most pirated show on television, but its network, HBO, seems to chalk it up to part of the show's success.

We don't encourage pirating at all, but it's how some cord-cutters fill in pieces of programming they can't get without a cable or satellite subscription.

Which brings us back to the question of cord-cutting itself. If price is the motivating factor, it wouldn't hurt to call your provider and let them know you plan to cancel.

Some cable or satellite providers will cut your monthly fee for six months or a year, offer extra channels and provide new equipment to keep you from switching or cutting service.

If that doesn't work, switching to a different company is another option likely to bring with it discounts, at least in the short term.

Before cutting service, it's a good idea to add up the costs of all TV episodes you might buy, services you might subscribe to and the cost of additional hardware you'd need and compare that to your cable or satellite bill.