

The Streaming Revolution

In 2017, television consumers have more control and flexibility than ever before in choosing the how, what, when, and where of their viewing experience. In the early 2000s consumers could watch only what was on at the time, or what they could purchase. Fans of shows had to schedule their time around content airtimes and programming was limited. The advent of streaming has done away with these frustrations.

In the last decade, the proliferation of streaming services has revolutionized the television industry and viewer experience. With streaming, the control has been transferred from television providers to the viewers. Consumers now have access to customized content for \$10 monthly on average (Josephson). Streaming service leaders like Netflix, Hulu, and Amazon make thousands of shows and movies available on demand. Customers can access shows and watch them virtually anywhere on any device with an internet connection.

Streaming services have also revolutionized how programming is made and how television providers approach that programming. Many streaming services have cut commercials out entirely. Lack of network guidelines and freedom from advertising slots has led to a renaissance age in content creation. Creators no longer need to worry about fitting into traditional 30-minute or 60-minute programming blocks. Streaming services are freer to pick up niche and experimental content that caters to more specific audiences. This has generated greater diversity in available content. Content creators are not limited to trends and tropes to ensure that their content is picked up by networks. Additionally, consistent weekly ratings matter less when entire seasons are released at once. It is now more important to find content that will generate buzz and stand out in a vast catalogue. Streaming services are providing platforms for previously overlooked content.

Shows that may have been independent or that lacked the budget to become box-office hits, have found dedicated communities on streaming platforms. A great example of this is the Netflix original show "Sense8," which boasts a diverse cast including main characters of multiple ethnicities, sexual orientations, and gender identities. A show like this with controversial content would have a small chance of being greenlit on traditional networks. The common streaming service practice of releasing entire series en masse has also led to the creation of a new type of viewer: binge-watchers, those who watch more than one episode of a series in one sitting. According to the media research group Comscore, 46% of people aged 18-to-34 watch shows after they air with 42% of viewers binge-watch multiple episodes of a show, one to two times per month (Heltai). This new consumer has no need for a cable subscription.

Due to streaming, traditional TV subscriptions have decreased dramatically with some households cutting cable all together. It's not even just younger consumers, my uncle and grandmother are among the converts. They cite diversity of content and price points as reasons for switching. In 2016 the average price of cable TV was around \$ 103.10 ("Press Release"). With such a difference in price, cable companies are losing ground. According to a 2017 Fluent study of over 2,000 adults, 67% of U.S. residences had streaming services while only 61% of residences had cable services (Fluent). Still, cable providers are evolving. Many have made their own content available online to stream. Others are trying to attract binge-watchers. TBS premiered a new program, "Angie Tribeca," airing the entire first season in a 25 hour marathon. While the future of cable television is uncertain, one thing is clear: streaming has had a vast and profound impact on the way we watch TV, arguably for the better.

Citations

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