



Video on demand

Australian TV fans are suddenly spoiled for streaming choice, says **Ros Page** – so how do you decide which service is right for you?

When we look back on 2015, it will go down as the year streaming came to Australia in a real way. Until recently, Australian viewers faced paying a hefty pay TV subscription or using a VPN (virtual private network) to access overseas services at a reasonable price. New streaming services have now finally brought the latest popular TV shows and movies to Australian viewers.

The questions now are: who has the content you're interested in and where can you watch it? CHOICE has sorted through the fine print to compile this round-up of internet streaming options.

Streaming vs downloading

Streaming means you're watching in real time, as you would with a YouTube video; downloading means you store a copy on your computer. Streaming services are also known as 'subscription video on demand' (SVOD) services.

In most cases, standard definition (SD) movies and TV shows are cheaper to stream and download than HD content. Content producers justify this because of the extra cost of producing and storing HD video. Some platforms, such as iTunes or EzyFlix, offer both streaming and downloading, while others, like Stan and Netflix, stream only.

Where and how to watch

- Pure streaming services such as Netflix, Quickflix, Foxtel Play and Stan require an internet-connected device to watch shows. See the table on page 18 to compare streaming services available in Australia.
- iTunes content can be watched on a PC or Mac through the iTunes software, on an iOS device such as an iPad or iPhone, and on a TV with an Apple TV.
- An Apple TV is a streaming device that plugs into a TV and also lets you 'cast' content from an iPhone, iPad or Mac wirelessly to the TV.
- Google Play content is watched on a PC

Apple vs Google

iTunes and Google Play are not pure streaming services, but both have popular, new release TV series and movies for watching online. Content can be streamed or downloaded and viewed on a range of devices.



iTunes is designed to be integrated with Apple devices such as iPhone, iPad and AppleTV,

although it's possible to watch iTunes content on a Mac computer or PC through the iTunes application that doubles as a storefront for buying content and media player software.

- New release TV download: SD \$3 per episode, HD \$3.50 per episode.
- New release movie stream: SD \$6, HD \$7. Buy and download: SD \$20, HD \$25.



Google play

Google Play is aimed at people using Android mobile devices and the Chromecast media streamer, although Google Play content can also be watched through a browser on a Mac or PC.

- New release TV download: SD \$3 per episode, HD \$3.50 per episode.
- New release movie stream: SD \$6, HD \$7. Buy and download: SD \$20, HD \$25.

or Mac through a browser, on an Android device such as a smartphone or tablet, or a TV with a Chromecast.

- Chromecast is a streaming device that plugs into a TV and is also used to stream content from Android phones and tablets as well as iPhones, iPads and Windows and Mac laptops to the TV. It can be used to cast Stan, Presto, Netflix, EzyFlix and Quickflix content.
- Internet-connected smart TVs and PVRs (personal video recorders) can access free-to-air TV catch-up services and some have apps to access streaming services.
- New games consoles, including the Sony PlayStation, Xbox and Nintendo Wii, link to video streaming services.

Which streaming service is best?

Your choice of SVOD service will depend on factors such as what you want to watch, when you want to watch it and how much you're prepared to pay.

Not everything you want to watch will be on the one platform at the time you want to see it. The new series of *House of Cards* is only screening on Netflix in Australia, while *Game of Thrones* will screen on Foxtel and may come later to the iTunes or Google Play stores as it has previously. *Breaking Bad* spin-off *Better Call Saul* streamed first on Stan and then on EzyFlix, although each episode was delayed 24 hours on EzyFlix.

Foxtel's Presto service doesn't have as much content as their pay TV option, but it's a lot cheaper. Foxtel Play costs more, but has most of the shows you'll find on Foxtel.

With many starting at \$10 a month, it could be worth signing up to multiple services to access a wider range of content. Some, such as Stan and Play, offer a free trial – a good way to see if the platform offers what you're after.



Unmetered content

Some internet service providers (ISPs) don't count certain content in your data plan. iView, the ABC's internet catch-up platform, is metered by some ISPs such as Telstra, TPG and Optus, but is unmetered by others including Adam Internet, iPrimus, Internode, iiNet and Westnet.

The SBS On Demand catch-up service is metered by all ISPs. The other free-to-air catch-up services will also be metered unless there's a special arrangement between your ISP and the broadcaster.

See the table on page 18 for more on which ISPs offer unmetered streaming.

What kind of internet plan do you need?

It can be hard to gauge what internet data allowance you'll need for streaming. As you watch more content on a streaming platform, you may need to increase your data allowance. Most streaming services are metered by your ISP, but there are some exceptions so check our table or ask your ISP if you're not sure. On average, you'll use 1GB per hour for streaming, although this could climb to 3GB per hour for high-definition content.

Keep a close eye on your usage for the first month or two after you sign up to a streaming platform, and check with your ISP to see how much it might cost to

upgrade your plan. Your ISP should send usage alerts when you start to use more than half your month's allowance.

Your ISP will have an account usage meter you can use, or try a browser plug-in such as NetUsage Item (netusage.iau5.com) or ShaPlus Bandwidth Meter (shaplus.com/bandwidth-meter). If you have a home network, check if your router has a usage meter so you can keep tabs on the download usage of all computers in your network.

What speed will you need?

Just what speed internet connection do you need to enjoy smooth streaming of audio and video? Streaming platforms recommend at least two megabits per second (Mbps) or an ADSL2+ connection to watch without major disruptions, although it needs to be faster for high-definition content. Some streaming services such as Netflix use 'adaptive streaming' to scale the quality for buffer-free, uninterrupted viewing.

And just what will happen if we all suddenly jump onto streaming? As more people choose to take their entertainment online, it will certainly put pressure on network capacity.

The upgraded National Broadband Network that uses copper, pay TV cables and fibre to the node should ease some capacity issues, although it will have a limit of 25Mbps, which could be a problem for streaming ultra high-definition content such as 4K TV and movies. ▶



Catch-up TV

Catch-up TV is the free-to-air channels' answer to streaming their own content. All of the TV networks now have catch-up TV services that will replay content for the digital channels in the network.



ABC iView
iview.abc.net.au

Where can I watch it?

- Desktop and laptop computer
- iOS and Android smartphones and tablets
- Chromecast
- Some Sony Bravia TVs
- Some LG, Panasonic and Samsung smart TVs and PVRs
- Fetch TV PVRs
- Humax and Topfield set-top boxes
- WD TV Live Plus and WD TV Live Hub media centres
- Sony PlayStation 3 and PlayStation 4
- Microsoft Xbox 360



- iOS and Android smartphones and tablets
- Kindle Fire devices
- Some Sony Bravia and Samsung smart TVs and Blu-ray players
- LG, Panasonic and Hisense smart TVs
- Xbox 360 and One, PlayStation 3, PlayStation 4 gaming consoles
- Telstra T-box and FetchTV PVRs
- Humax set-top box



SBS On Demand
sbs.com.au/ondemand

Where can I watch it?

- Desktop and laptop computer
- Windows Phone 7 and 8 devices



Channel 7
au.tv.yahoo.com

Where can I watch it?

- Desktop and laptop computer
- iOS and Android smartphones and tablets
- Some Samsung and Sony smart TVs
- Telstra T-box and FetchTV PVRs
- Xbox One, PlayStation 3, PlayStation 4 games consoles



Channel 9
9jumpin.com.au

Where can I watch it?

- Desktop and laptop computer
- iOS and Android smartphones and tablets



Channel 10
<http://tenplay.com.au>

Where can I watch it?

- Desktop and laptop computer
- iOS and Android, Windows 8, Windows Phone devices
- Apple TV
- Xbox One and Xbox 360 consoles
- Some Sony Bravia smart TVs
- FreeviewPlus smart TVs and PVRs
- FetchTV PVRs



What is Freeview?

freeviewTM

Freeview is the organisation of Australian free-to-air TV stations that brings together Seven, Nine and Ten networks as well as the ABC and SBS. It includes all the digital channels for these TV stations such as ABC1, 2 and 3, ABC News 24, SBS ONE and TWO, Seven, 7TWO, 7mate, Nine, GO!, GEM, TEN, ONE and ELEVEN.

It's accessible through digital TVs, digital video recorders, home entertainment consoles with a digital tuner, or analog TVs with a digital set-top box.

Freeview Plus is the internet catch-up TV platform for the free-to-air stations, and has an electronic program guide (EPG) for recording shows. It's being built into new TVs and PVRs for easy access to the catch-up apps.

What is Fetch TV?

fetch tv

Fetch TV is a free-to-air catch-up TV service that also offers a selection of pay TV channels and movies. It requires a Fetch TV PVR (personal video recorder), which can be bought outright or bundled with a subscription from ISPs, including Optus, iiNet, Adam Internet and Westnet. Fetch TV plans cost \$30 per month for the basic plus entertainment package that includes TV and movies. The entertainment package includes Disney, BBC First, TVH!ts, MTV, SyFy and NatGeo. It also has four free-to-air catch-up apps, and YouTube and Netflix apps integrated with the Fetch TV PVR.



What about US services?

Not so long ago, Australians looked beyond our shores for cheap, convenient entertainment, but this is changing. Local players have realised they need to be competitive to attract eyeballs and wallets from US platforms.

If you're thinking about using US streaming services instead of Australian, you'll need to factor in the cost of VPN (virtual private network) access to hide your Australian location. VPN is needed to access overseas sites that are blocked to Australians and can cost between \$5 and \$10 per month. (Read our review of VPN services at choice.com.au/VPNreviews.)

Hola (hola.org) has both a free and a paid VPN service that will connect with overseas sites. The Hola browser plug-in has Chrome and Firefox versions for both Windows and Macs. It works with a range of online music and video services including Netflix, Hulu, Pandora, iTV and Channel 4.

Media Hint (mediahint.com) is a paid unblocker that has Chrome and Firefox plug-ins. The service works in the background, unlike Hola, which has an icon in the desktop toolbar to indicate it's running.

US services

Amazon Prime Instant Video

Amazon Prime is an online movie and TV portal from the book-selling giant. Yearly subscription provides unlimited access to movies and TV shows – including new release titles and kids' shows – as well as ebook loans.

Cost: \$US99 per year

Hulu Plus

Hulu has a large catalogue of movies and TV, including *Revenge*, *Glee*, *The Good Wife*, *Modern Family*, *Grey's Anatomy*, *South Park* and *Doctor Who*, as well as foreign language shows. The service includes free short- and long-form content, including TV shows and clips from popular shows, interviews with TV stars and news segments.

Cost: \$US8 per month

Netflix

In the US, Netflix has a catalogue of TV shows like *Breaking Bad*, as well as the Netflix original series *House of Cards* and the fourth season of *Arrested Development*.

Cost: \$US9 per month ▶



	 BIGPOND MOVIES	 DENDY DIRECT	 EZYFLIX	 FOXTEL
Type of service	Streaming	Streaming and download	Streaming and download	Pay TV needs Foxtel iQ PVR
Price (subscription / pay-as-you-go)	 New release movies \$6 (SD), \$7 (HD); TV \$2 p/episode	 New release movies stream \$6 (SD), download \$25 (SD); TV download from \$1 (SD), \$1.50 (HD) per episode	 New release movies stream \$6 (SD), \$7 (HD), download \$20 (SD), \$25 (HD); TV download \$3 (SD), \$3.50 (HD) per episode	 Starts at \$25 /month for basic entertainment pack that includes iQ, plus \$20 /month for drama and \$20 /month for movies packages
URL	bigpondmovies.com	dendydirect.com.au	ezyflix.tv	foxtel.com.au
TV	Limited TV series but does include <i>Breaking Bad</i>	Series such as <i>Gallipoli</i> , <i>Empire</i> , <i>Homeland</i> and <i>Walking Dead</i>	<i>House of Cards</i> , <i>Orange is the New Black</i> , <i>Better Call Saul</i> ; usually 24 hours after first airing elsewhere	Drama package required for <i>Game of Thrones</i> , <i>The Walking Dead</i> , <i>Girls</i> , <i>Mad Men</i> , <i>Veep</i> , <i>Orange is the New Black</i> , <i>Ray Donovan</i>
Movies	New release movies and large back catalogue	Arthouse movies from the Dendy cinema chain	New release movies and limited back collection	Movie package features new release films
Smartphone/tablet apps				
Browsers	Internet Explorer, Firefox, Safari	Internet Explorer 10, 11; Firefox 24+ Safari 6.0+, Chrome	Chrome, Safari, IE, Firefox	Internet Explorer
Digital streamer	✗	Apple TV; Chromecast to come	Chromecast	✗
Smart TVs	Some Samsung, LG and Panasonic TVs and DVD players, Telstra T-Box	Samsung smart TV compatibility to come	Samsung smart TV	✗
Games consoles	✗	✗	✗	✗
Resolution	SD 576, HD 720p, HD T-Box 1080	SD 540p, HD 1080p	SD 540p, HD 720p	SD, no HD
Min. internet speed required	1.2Mbps	2Mbps	1.5Mbps SD, 3Mbps HD	3Mbps for Foxtel Go
Unmetered content	Unmetered for BigPond Broadband subscribers	✗	✗	✗
Number of devices	Register one account and playback on one device	Register up to five devices and watch content on one device at a time	Register up to five devices and watch simultaneously on five devices	Register up to three devices and watch on two simultaneously
Notes	Integrates with Telstra T-Box PVR \$144 outright 230GB capacity	Movies and TV can only be played in Australia	Watch UltraViolet and Disney Digital digital copies from DVD	Subscription includes Foxtel Go mobile streaming
CHOICE Verdict	A good choice if you're a Telstra internet customer and want films for all the family.	Movie lovers can feast on independent, arthouse and foreign films – just remember it's not all-you-can-eat!	Rent or buy lots of TV shows or movies. A good choice if you want more than just streaming.	Expensive, but will give you most of the prestige TV shows and new movies if you fork out for the premium package.

				
NETFLIX AUSTRALIA	FOXTEL PLAY	PRESTO	QUICKFLIX	STAN
Streaming	Streaming	Streaming	Streaming and DVD and Blu-ray post-back service	Streaming
 Single-stream SD \$9/month ; two-stream HD \$12/month ; four-stream 4K/UHD \$15/month	 Starts at \$25/month for basic entertainment pack, plus \$20/month for premium drama and movies package	 \$10/month for TV or movies, \$15/month for TV and movies	 \$10/month , premium movies \$6/movie and premium TV \$3/episode ; DVD post-back service from \$13/month	 \$10/month
netflix.com/au-en	foxtel.com.au/foxtelplay	presto.com.au	quickflix.com.au	stan.com.au
Netflix original series including <i>House of Cards</i> , <i>Marco Polo</i> , <i>Sense8</i> , <i>Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt</i> as well as other TV series such as <i>Gotham</i>	Premium drama package required for <i>Game of Thrones</i> , <i>The Walking Dead</i> , <i>Girls</i> , <i>Mad Men</i> , <i>Veep</i> , <i>Orange is the New Black</i> , <i>Ray Donovan</i>	Some new series (<i>Girls</i> , <i>Ray Donovan</i> , <i>The Newsroom</i>) as well as older series (e.g. <i>Nurse Jackie</i> , <i>The Wire</i>). Not showing series such as <i>Game of Thrones</i> or <i>Veep</i> that are on Foxtel pay TV	<i>The Walking Dead</i> , <i>Orange is the New Black</i> , <i>Game of Thrones</i> , <i>Scandal</i> , <i>Sherlock</i> , <i>Mad Men</i> , <i>Veep</i> , <i>Orphan Black</i>	<i>Better Call Saul</i> , <i>Community</i> S6, <i>Transparent</i> , <i>Mozart in the Jungle</i> , <i>Dig</i> , <i>Lost Girl</i> S4 & 5
Movies from Roadshow Entertainment, Beyond Distribution, the ABC and Disney	Premium Movies and Drama package needed for wide range of mainstream, world, art house and kids movies	Popular mainstream adults and kids movies but not new release titles at the same time as pay TV	Popular mainstream films including <i>Before I Go to Sleep</i> , <i>Fury</i> , <i>Guardians of the Galaxy</i> , <i>The November Man</i> , <i>Maleficent</i>	Every James Bond film, as well as new release movies from Roadshow (e.g. <i>The Lego Movie</i> , the first two <i>Hobbit</i> films), SBS World Movies and Australian films such as <i>Animal Kingdom</i>
				
Internet Explorer, Chrome, Firefox, Safari	Internet Explorer, Safari	Internet Explorer, Chrome, Firefox, Safari	Chrome, Internet Explorer, Safari	Chrome, Internet Explorer, Firefox, Safari
Apple TV, Chromecast	✗	Chromecast	Chromecast	Chromecast, Apple TV
Some Samsung, LG, Sony, Panasonic, Philips and Hisense smart TVs	Some Samsung smart TVs and Blu-ray players, some LG smart TVs	✗	Some Panasonic Viera, Samsung and Sony Bravia smart TVs	✗
Sony PlayStation 3 and 4, Xbox 360 and One, Wii U	Sony PlayStation 3 and 4, Xbox 360	✗	Xbox 360, Xbox One, PlayStation 3 and 4	✗
SD 480p, 720p and 1080p; HD 3840p; 4K Ultra HD	SD, no HD	SD, no HD	SD 480p or 576p depending on program, HD 720p	SD 720p HD 1080p
0.5Mbps	3Mbps	3Mbps	1.5Mbps	2.5Mbps
iiNet, Optus and Internode customers get unmetered streaming	Telstra BigPond customers	Foxtel and Telstra broadband customers	Coming soon to selected ISPs	Currently in discussions with ISPs
Register and play on one, two or four devices depending on subscription	Register up to three devices and watch on two simultaneously	Register up to four devices and play on two devices simultaneously	Register up to six devices and streaming three simultaneously	Six devices can be registered and three devices can be played simultaneously
Netflix offers content in ultra HD 4K, which all original shows are now filmed in	This is Foxtel pay TV without the contract and hardware and includes Foxtel Go apps	Designed for movie lovers or binge TV watchers as add-on subscription	60,000 titles in DVD post-back library and no late fees	Joint venture between Fairfax and Nine Entertainment; expect to find a lot of Channel 9 content
A good choice if you love <i>House of Cards</i> and want to try some of the new Netflix Originals series.	A cheaper alternative to pay TV, with many new TV shows and movies as well as extras packages such as sports – but those do cost extra.	You can choose movies, TV, or both options. Missing some popular series, but plenty of content from Disney, Showtime and the Seven Network.	A good choice if you want the back catalogue of HBO shows, like <i>The Wire</i> , and BBC content, such as <i>Sherlock</i> , with rent and buy options.	Good content for kids (but no Disney). Plenty of TV series and movies from big studios, some exclusives, and Australian content. ■