

LEARNING MADE EASY



Cord Cutting

for
dummies[®]
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Overhaul your TV options
to fit your budget

Add streaming devices
to your home

Upgrade your Wi-Fi
for better streaming

Paul McFedries

Author of *Amazon Fire TV
For Dummies*



Cord Cutting

by Paul McFedries

**for
dummies®**
A Wiley Brand

Cord Cutting For Dummies®

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Introduction

William the Conqueror, it is said, began by eating a mouthful of English sand.

— SALMAN RUSHDIE

As I write this, more than 40 million people in the United States alone have cut the cord and banished the cable company from their lives. What we have here, beyond any doubt, is a genuine phenomenon. We're witnessing a kind of cord-cutting frenzy as people of all ages, all regions, and all walks of life thumb their noses at traditional cable and opt, instead, for the freedom of a cable-less lifestyle.

If you're looking to join this movement, I have some good news right off the bat: Unlike William the Conqueror, you don't need to eat a mouthful of sand to get started. Ah, I hear you ask, but where do I start? If you have even a passing familiarity with watching TV without cable, you know that it's a sprawling, labyrinthine, and constantly changing topic. So many shows! So many channels! So many services! So many devices! Where, indeed, do you start?

I'm glad you asked, because that's exactly where *Cord Cutting For Dummies* comes in. I've traveled the entire cord-cutting landscape from east to west and from north to south. I've connected the devices, subscribed to the services, and installed the apps. The result is the book you're holding (physically or virtually).

About This Book

Cord Cutting For Dummies shows you not only how to get the cable company out of your life but also what to do after that. This book takes you on a tour of all the main (and a few minor) ways to watch TV without cable.

In Part 1, you learn lots of good reasons why you should cut the cord (plus a few sensible reasons why going cordless might *not* be a good idea for you) and you get a step-by-step plan for going cord-free.

In Part 2, you get your post-cord life off to a free and easy start by learning all about over-the-air TV, where you get high-quality channels free (yep, that's right: *free*). You learn how over-the-air TV works, what equipment you need, and how to set everything up.

In Part 3, you dive into streaming services such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, and Hulu. You learn about streaming media players and smart TVs, and how to get your Internet access ready for streaming. You then check out a bunch of free and paid streaming services.

Finally, in Part 4, you learn ten ways to save money after you've cut the cord and ten tips for troubleshooting streaming problems.

The chapters present their info and techniques in readily digestible, bite-size chunks, so you can certainly graze your way through this book.

Foolish Assumptions

Cord Cutting For Dummies is for people who are new (or relatively new) to cord cutting. This doesn't mean, however, that the book is suitable for everyone. I've made a few assumptions about what is necessary if you want to flourish in a cable-free world. Here they are:

- » You know how to connect devices to your TV.
- » You have an Internet connection and a Wi-Fi network.
- » You can use a web browser to navigate to a particular website given that site's address.
- » You know the basics of launching and using mobile device apps.

That's about it, really. Cord cutting is a big topic, but it's not one that requires a huge amount of technical literacy. And what literacy you *do* need I explain as we go along.

Icons Used in This Book

Like other books in the *Dummies* series, this book uses icons, or little margin pictures, to flag info.



REMEMBER

This icon marks text that contains info that's useful or important enough that you'd do well to store the text somewhere safe in your memory for later recall.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

This icon extra information that either is a bit on the advanced side or goes into heroic, often obscure detail about the topic at hand. Do you need to read it? Not at all. Does that make the text a waste of page real estate? I don't think so, because the information is useful for folks interested in delving into the minutiae of cord cutting. If that's not you, ignore away.



TIP

This icon marks text that contains a shortcut or an easier way to do things, which I hope will make your life — or, at least, the data analysis portion of your life — more efficient.



WARNING

This icon marks text that contains a friendly but insistent reminder to avoid doing something. You have been warned.

Beyond the Book

To locate this book's cheat sheet, go to www.dummies.com and search for *Cord Cutting For Dummies*. See the cheat sheet for some recommended streaming media services for kids' programming, sports, and news.

Where to Go from Here

This book consists of a couple of hundred pages. Do I expect you to read every word on every page? Yes, I do. Just kidding! No, of course I don't. Entire sections — heck, maybe even entire chapters — might contain information that's not relevant to you.

In *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, the King of Hearts tells Alice that she should, "Begin at the beginning and go on till you come to the end: then stop." But you don't have to follow his advice here.

However, if you're just getting started down the cord-cutting road — particularly if you're not sure you even *want* to cut the cord — no problem: I'm here to help. To get your cord-cutting education off to a solid start, I highly recommend that you start with Chapter 1 to find out if you really do want to go cable-free. If you do, continue with Chapter 2 to find out how it's done. From there, you can travel to the post-cable territory of Chapters 3 and beyond.

If you have some experience with cord cutting or you have a special interest or question, see the table of contents or the index to find out where I cover that topic, and then turn to that page.

Either way, happy cord cutting!

1

Some Cord-Cutting Basics

IN THIS PART . . .

Discover some excellent reasons why you should — or maybe shouldn't — cut the cable TV cord.

Follow a step-by-step guide to cutting the cord.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Having fun dissing the cable company
- » Seeing if cutting the cord is right for you
- » Understanding the benefits of cutting the cord
- » Touring a world without cable

Chapter 1

Why Cut the Cord?

You can get a TV signal into your home these days in many ways, but most methods involve running some kind of cord into your home and then into a device. That device might be a TV, a set-top box, or even a cable modem.

So far, so obvious. My point here is to bring your attention to the cord itself, which carries this book's symbolic load. Why? Because a new and growing legion of people are using their cable TV cord as a symbol for protest.

Who are these people? The *cord shavers* (also called *cord trimmers*) take steps to reduce their cable TV bill. The *cord avoiders* look for online alternatives to paying for cable TV offerings. Next are the *cord haters*, who really dislike paying for cable TV. All these people look on in envy at the *cord nevers*, people who have never had a cable TV account.

The cord shavers, cord avoiders, and cord haters can't be cord nevers, but they can certainly become *cord cutters*. Those are people who metaphorically snip their cable TV cord by non-metaphorically canceling their cable TV subscription and looking for televised entertainment elsewhere.

If you find your blood pressure getting dangerously high each time you pay your cable TV bill, you might be ready to become a cord cutter. To make sure, this chapter talks about why you might want to go the cord-cutting route (and a little bit about why you might not).

What's So Bad about Cable? (Let Me Count the Ways)

Every year, various media organizations publish articles with titles along the lines of “The Ten Most Hated Companies” or “The Twenty Worst Companies.” A wide variety of industries is represented, from airlines to social media companies to banking institutions. The lists change year to year, but you can always count on at least one or more cable companies making the list.

Let's face it: Many of us *really* dislike our cable provider. What about you? How do you feel about the company that brings cable TV into your home?

Okay, you're reading a book about cord cutting, so I have to assume that you're at least peeved at your cable company. Or maybe a bit miffed. But however you feel, you might need coaxing before you go any further. Sure, I understand: Cutting the cord is a big step. To help you make your decision, this section details ten solid reasons why you might want to cancel your cable subscription and join the ranks of cord cutters.

Cable TV is expensive

Aside from essential utilities (heat, electricity, water, phone) and expenses such as groceries and a car payment, most of your regular monthly payments probably don't amount to that much money. Five dollars here, ten dollars there, twenty dollars somewhere else. Then your monthly cable bill comes due and, by contrast, it's probably a whopper: Depending on your channels, packages, equipment, and bundles, you can easily be paying a hundred, two hundred, even three hundred dollars or more — a *month!*

As much as you might enjoy the cable company's offerings, that cable bill qualifies as an extravagance. Now, as you soon see, money isn't the only reason to cut yourself free from cable, but for most would-be cord cutters, it's the reason that gets people thinking there has to be a better (and cheaper) way.

You still get bombarded by commercials

You pay your budget-busting cable bill and now you're stressed and angry. What's the antidote? You know: Watch a little TV. But when you turn on the set, chances are the first thing you see is a commercial. Then another one. And another. Sure, you're a savvy TV pro, so you know where to find the mute button on your remote.

But still: Doesn't it rankle? You pay a queen's ransom for (apparently) the privilege of watching TV, only to be subjected to endless come-ons for hemorrhoid remedies and car insurance. That's just wrong.

You probably watch only a teensy fraction of what you pay for

The Bruce Springsteen song "57 Channels (and Nothin' On)" was released way back in 1992, but it's still relevant today. Except now it's closer to 557 channels. However many channels come with your cable package, it's a safe bet that you find a depressingly vast majority of them unwatchable so they are therefore unwatched.

Sure, you have your favorite stations, but how many do you watch regularly? A dozen? Maybe a couple dozen? That still leaves hundreds of channels gathering dust. Even worse: You're paying for those dust-covered channels. Why would anyone do that?

Bundles are (usually) bad

The standard way to save money when it comes to the cable company is to invest in a *bundle*: a collection of cable company services that includes not only cable TV but also Internet access, a

home phone, a cellular plan, or some combination of these and other offerings. Instead of paying for each service by itself, you bundle them for a substantial discount.

That makes sense, but there's a fly in the bundle ointment: Almost always, at least one of the bundled services will be *terrible*. It might have cheap — or even used! — equipment, spotty service, minimal features, or (all too often) all of the above. Even though you save money with a second-rate service, you shouldn't have to live like that.

Long-term (read: loyal) customers pay more, not less

If you're a regular customer at your local coffee shop, every now and then the manager might slip you a free coffee or muffin. If you buy lots of clothes at a local independent retailer, the owner might give you a discount on a larger purchase. What these small businesses understand is the value of customer loyalty: It pays in the long term to keep regular customers happy.

Your cable company understands this, too, right? Hah, don't make me laugh! In fact, your cable provider probably does the opposite. That is, they probably offer discounted subscriptions to new customers, while charging substantially higher prices to long-term subscribers. It's madness, but welcome to the wacky world of the cable company!



REMEMBER

If you plan on sticking with your cable subscription, at least for a while, you can almost certainly negotiate a lower price. Call the cable company, complain about how high your monthly bill has become, and then threaten to either switch to another provider (assuming there is one where you live) or cancel your subscription. It might take some perseverance on your part and a session with someone in the Customer Retention department, but you'll get there.

You're getting nicked-and-dimed

If you've ever been brave (or foolhardy) enough to examine the details of your cable bill, chances are you came away even angrier

than you were going in. It's not just the sheer size of the final total that stresses everyone out, but the long list of incidental and hidden fees and surcharges that are standard-issue line items in every cable bill. These fees go by various names:

- » Network access fee
- » Broadcast TV fee
- » HD technology fee
- » Regional sports surcharge
- » Terminal fee
- » Franchise fee

The list goes on and on and includes lots of regulatory fees mandated by the government, which the cable company is happy to pass on to you as so-called *pass-through fees*. These fees and surcharges easily cost you hundreds of dollars a year. Boo!

You're dealing with a near-monopoly

Mom-and-pop shops in the cable business don't exist because cable requires huge infrastructure investments. That's fine, but with recent consolidations in the industry, the gargantuan just keep getting gargantuan-er. The result is that even large markets have few options for cable TV providers, and small markets might have just a single company "vying" for their business.

This lack of competition is bad news for you. It keeps cable prices high, encourages cable companies to charge — and increase — hidden fees (as I describe in the preceding section), and gives cable behemoths zero incentive to provide decent customer service and technical support (travesties that I talk about in the next two sections).