



Inside TV

HBO to finally offer stand-alone streaming service



By [James Hibberd](#) on Oct 15, 2014 at 11:05AM [@james_hibberd](#)

HBO is finally cutting the cord: The premium cable network announced Wednesday it plans to offer an online-only streaming service starting next year.

The big move puts HBO on track to more directly compete with Netflix and will give viewers a method of accessing all current HBO programming without a cable subscription.

HBO chairman and CEO Richard Plepler made the announcement while addressing an investor meeting for parent company Time Warner. The executive first presented HBO's domestic returns, then noted there are 10 million broadband-only homes—a number that's expected to increase.

"That is a large and growing opportunity that should no longer be left untapped," Plepler said. "It is time to remove all barriers to those who want HBO. So, in 2015, we will launch a stand-alone, over-the-top, HBO service in the United States. We will work with our current partners. And, we will explore models with new partners. All in, there are 80 million homes that do not have HBO and we will use all means at our disposal to go after them."

Plepler ran down three potential distribution models for the streaming service. The first is to sell the online-only service through HBO's existing cable providers. (For example, if you have broadband service through Time Warner or Comcast and want the network's streaming service, you would be able to purchase the online service without having any cable channels.) The second is to distribute the service via new partners like Amazon, Google or Microsoft. The third method would be to attempt the Netflix model, whereby HBO markets its streaming service direct to consumers and skips the middlemen.

Cord-cutting HBO fans have increasingly clamored for the service to be made available without a traditional cable subscription. The network's most popular program in its history, *Game of Thrones*, has been ranked the most pirated TV show in the world, and one common refrain among illegal downloaders is that there is no way to legally obtain the series in a timely manner without opting into an expensive cable TV package.

HBO launched a streaming app called HBO Go in 2010 to view its current programs, but it's only available to subscribers of its traditional cable service. The network took another step into the streaming world earlier this year by licensing a large portion of its library to Amazon Prime.