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PERSONAL TECHNOLOGY

PlayStation Vue Review: A Real Rival to Cable TV...For a Price

Sony's breakthrough Internet TV service delivers live shows and a DVR in the cloud



By

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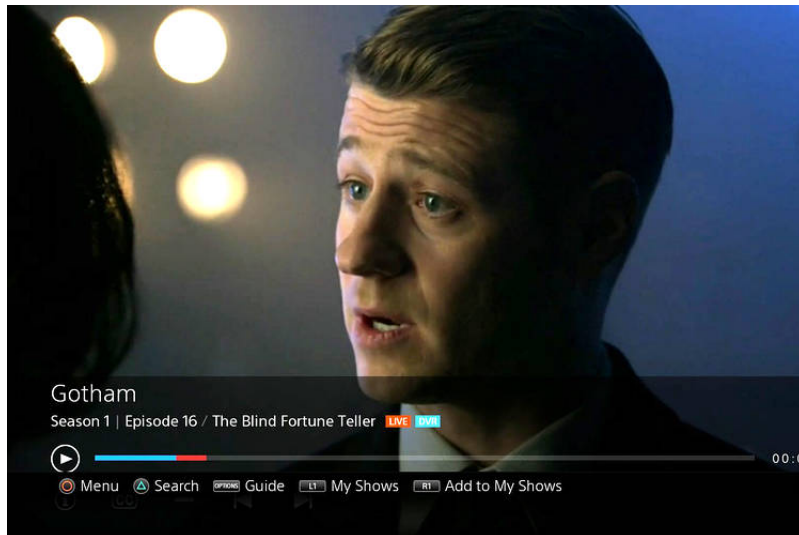
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For TV lovers who think cable represents the forces of darkness, an Internet TV service called Sony PlayStation Vue might seem like Buffy the Cable-Box Slayer.

Vue is a TV breakthrough because it streams a lineup of channels that isn't riddled with holes. It plays and records live NBC, Comedy Central, Fox News, MTV and 80 others on a PlayStation game console. Using Vue for a week mostly sated my TV needs, with bonuses such as a virtual DVR that never fills up.

Here's the problem: Vue costs \$50 to \$70 a month, depending on your channel lineup. If you also pay \$60 for Internet access, you're really not saving any money. So why bother cutting cable at all?

It's a wake-up for everyone eager to break up with cable: Internet TV isn't necessarily cheap TV. The price may limit Vue's appeal as a cable alternative,



Sony's PlayStation Vue lets you watch shows like Fox's 'Gotham' live, or save them to the cloud to watch later.

PHOTO: SONY

though its availability on one of the 35 million PlayStation 3 or 4 consoles already in American homes—and a lack of long-term commitment—may help it appeal to people who have never had cable.

Even if Vue can't beat cable on cost and comes with some other annoyances, I like it because it's the first Internet service to push TV into new territory without leaving too much behind.

Find your new home now ...

Address, City, Zip

Price



Back in January, the \$20-per-month Sling TV became the first streaming service with major live networks. Vue takes that to the next level, filling in big networks like NBC and longtime streaming holdouts like Fox News.

Vue is missing two biggies, unfortunately: ABC and ESPN, both owned by Disney. Sony says it is talking to other companies to bring them on board—HBO and other premium cable channels are also missing—but who knows when those might materialize? (ESPN is already on Sling TV.)

Vue is available for now in just New York, Chicago and Philadelphia because its

content agreements are specific to local markets. Sony plans to roll it out in other big cities soon.

To use Vue, you must have a PlayStation 3 or 4. If you're already in Sony's target demographic, this is amazing news. If you're more partial to Xbox, or aren't a gamer at all, Vue isn't for you. Operating the TV with the game controller frustrated me for about an hour until I figured out its seven buttons. A traditional linear program guide shows what's on right now—though there's no one-button way to change the channel.

WHAT'S INCLUDED IN VUE

PlayStation Vue offers more than 80 live cable channels. Here are the biggest highlights from the service's three different packages:

\$50 Access

CBS, FOX, NBC, Telemundo, Animal Planet, BET, Bravo, Cartoon Network/Adult Swim, CMT, CNBC, CNN, Comedy Central, Discovery, E!, Food Network, Fox Business, Fox News, Fox Sports, HGTV, HLN, MSNBC, MTV, Nat Geo, Nickelodeon, Syfy, TBS, TLC, TNT, USA Network, VH1 (AMC coming in April)

\$60 Core

All of the above, plus TCM and sports channels such as YES Network (New York only) Comcast SportsNet (Philadelphia and Chicago only)

\$70 Elite

All of the above, plus sports and lifestyle channels such as Fox College Sports, LOGO, MTV Hits, Nat Geo Wild, Teen Nick, Universal, VH1 Classic

What's Missing

ABC, ESPN, Disney

(An iPad version of Vue is in the works, but Sony couldn't show it to me yet.)



One hole in PlayStation Vue's lineup is Disney's ABC network, which features "Marvel's Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D." among other primetime shows. PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

Vue's main interface is a big, beautiful list of all your shows, not channels. You can search alphabetically or by categories. You click one button to record into perpetuity.

With a traditional DVR, you have to worry about filling up storage. But Vue saves everything in the cloud, so you can amass shows with wild abandon—saving a month of episodes for up to 500 different series.

This cloud DVR is a smart idea, but it's not exactly TiVo. First, the 28-day storage limit means you can't dally on watching those "Tonight Show" episodes.

Second, when you're fast-forwarding and rewinding recorded shows, you can't see what you're skipping, so it's hard to blast past commercials. A small number of shows are still blocked from streaming entirely, though Sony says all primetime programming is available.

Media deals hold back Vue in other ways, too. Since every channel's content is already being saved, why can't all subscribers see it automatically, instead of going through the fake DVR act? This would have helped when I decided to catch up on "Empire" last week. And people with several homes may hope Vue is a way to save on pay TV, but Sony stops you from moving your account around.

If Vue isn't really about saving money, it needs to provide a better overall TV viewing experience than cable. It's made strides, but it still needs to use the full

power of PlayStation to integrate its content with Hulu, Netflix and other services. To my mind, TiVo is still the maestro of the spare-no-expense TV experience. Its Roamio DVR lets you see everything you pay for in one search.

None of that is beyond Vue's reach. The best thing about Internet TV is that its software can keep improving. Now that (almost) all the best channels and shows are shrugging off cable's yoke, new ideas can multiply.

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