

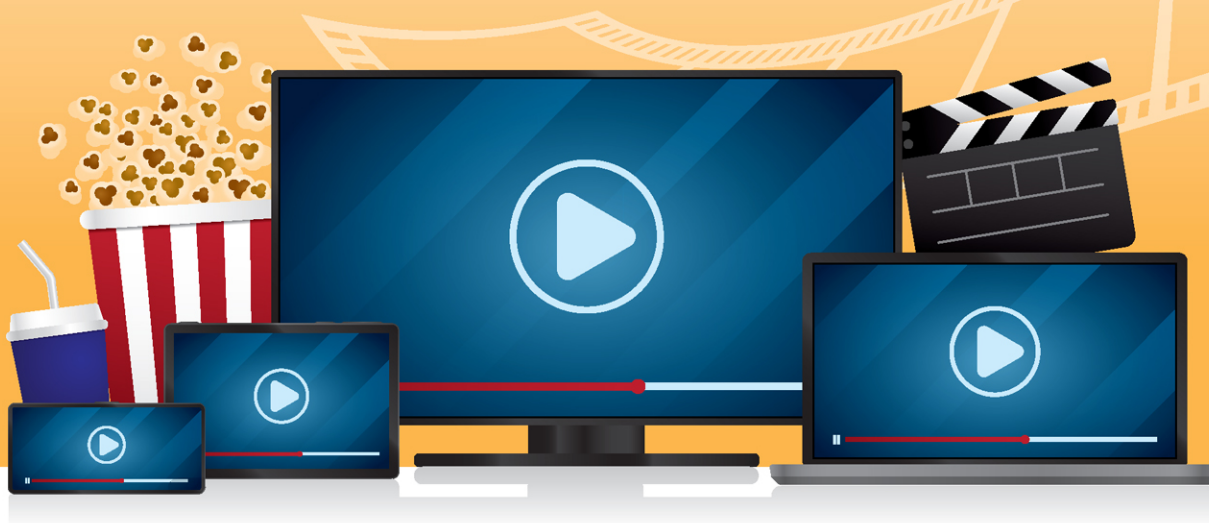
# My TV *for* Seniors

SECOND EDITION

## COVERS

what, how, and  
where to watch  
for less

An AARP TV  
for Grownups  
publication

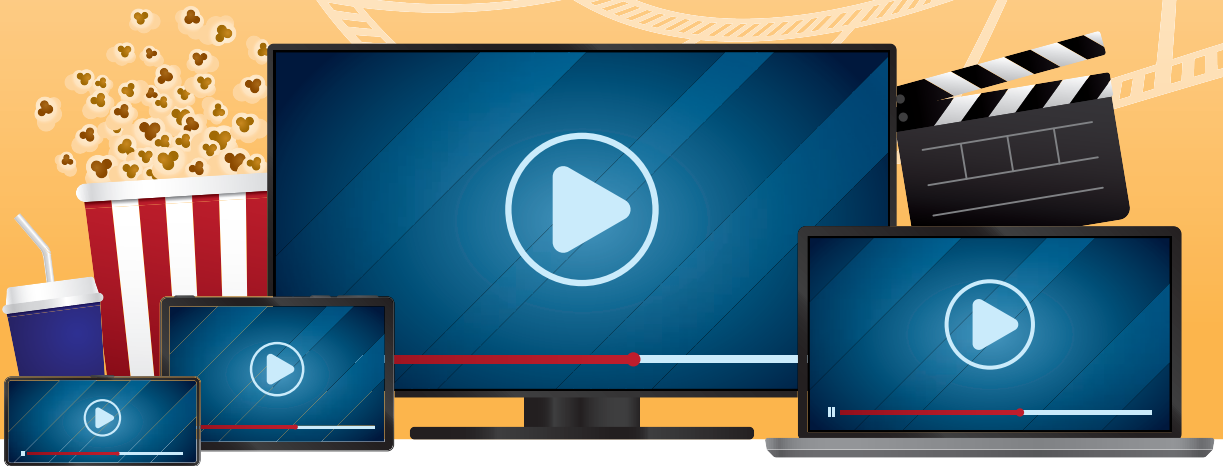


**AARP**<sup>®</sup>  
Real Possibilities

Michael Miller

SECOND EDITION

# My TV *for* Seniors



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**que**<sup>®</sup>

**AARP**<sup>®</sup>  
Real Possibilities

Back then, local stations transmitted in analog format on either the Very High Frequency (VHF) or Ultra High Frequency (UHF) bands, in glorious black and white (until 1965 or so, when everything started to switch to color). VHF stations were numbered 2 through 13 (there was no channel 1), and UHF stations went up from there.

In Indianapolis, the ABC station was channel 13, WLWI; it was part of the WLW Television Network out of Cincinnati, and during the daytime it broadcast regional shows such as *The Ruth Lyons 50-50 Club* and *The Paul Dixon Show*. The CBS station was channel 8, WISH. The NBC station was channel 6, WFBM (pronounced “woof boom”). And our final station was the independent channel 4, WTTV, which showed lots of cartoons and syndicated programming, including my favorite show, *The Adventures of Superman*. (WTTV was technically based about 100 miles south of Indianapolis in Bloomington, Indiana, and because of that distance offered the worst reception.)

Receiving these stations meant connecting some sort of antenna to your TV set. Portable TVs had built-in “rabbit ear” antennas in those days; a console TV had to be connected to either a set-top antenna or a rooftop one. My father’s television store installed a lot of outdoor antennas on local rooftops and in people’s attics.

In the 1970s, we started seeing more local stations. The Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) entered the scene in 1970 (in Indianapolis, on channel 20, WFYI). Many cities saw an influx of independent stations, often broadcasting on the UHF band; our city had a couple of religious broadcasters up in the high numbers on the television dial.

The later ’70s also saw the introduction of cable television, which had dozens of channels, including all the local channels plus some. Cable let us see all the channels as clear as a bell, no snow or ghosts. It also brought us more national channels, including the first cable news channel, CNN. Cable changed the nature of broadcasting forever, adding more and more channels every year and making the local channels less and less important. Still, those days as a kid growing up with just four channels on the VHF dial remain something special in my memories. Even with that limited choice, there always seemed to be something good on.

## Other Ways to Watch Local Channels

Watching local channels (and national broadcast networks) over the air, via antenna, is free and relatively easy to do. It might not be the best solution for all, however—which is why you also can view your local channels via cable, satellite, or the Internet.

### Watch via Cable

Cable TV started out as a way for viewers to get crystal clear reception on local channels that they otherwise have trouble receiving via antenna. It makes sense that most viewers today still receive their local channels via their cable TV providers.

All cable providers in the United States provide at least the major stations in any given area over their cable systems, in widescreen HD. Some providers also offer channels from nearby cities. Check with your cable system to see what local channels are available, and for how much. (Local channels are typically part of a provider's basic tier of channels; sometimes you can subscribe to just the local channels for a relatively low price.)

Some cable providers also offer at least some local subchannels, although not all subchannels are always available. So, if you're a fan of MeTV, AntennaTV, or any other particular diginet, make sure that subchannel is offered by your cable provider.

The advantage of getting your local channels over cable is one of reliability. If you have trouble receiving a given channel via antenna, getting it via cable will solve your problems. You also don't have to worry about bad weather knocking out your locals; they're always there on cable. (Unless the cable system has a reception or delivery problem, that is.)

The primary disadvantage of receiving local channels via cable is the cost. With local-over-cable, you're paying for something you'd otherwise receive for free. If you're okay with that, fine, but cutting the cable cord completely (and watching your local channels via antenna) can put money in your pocket.

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## More About Cable and Satellite

Learn more about cable and satellite television in Chapter 4, “Getting Cable and Satellite TV.”

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## Watch via Satellite

Similarly, both major U.S. satellite television services (DirecTV and DISH Network) include local channels as part of their programming packages. In these cases, the providers receive the local channels via antenna, beam those signals up to their satellites, and then beam them back down to your receiving dish. It’s kind of a long way to go for a signal that’s pulsing through the air outside your home, but that’s the way satellite works.

As with cable services, the satellite services don’t always offer all local channels (especially some of the low-power ones) or all local subchannels. This last issue is a deal-breaker for many; if your favorite diginet isn’t available over satellite, you might not want to go this route.

In addition, weather plays a big role in satellite reception, so getting your local channels (especially your local weather) could be an issue during heavy rains or snows. I found it intolerable to have the satellite reception of my local weathercasters go blank just when I needed them to tell me what was happening during inclement weather. I prefer the more reliable reception of local stations I get via cable or antenna.

The major upside of receiving your locals via satellite, then, is convenience. If you use a satellite provider to receive all your other programming, it’s just easier to receive your local channels that way, too. The downsides are cost (paying for what you could otherwise get for free) and reliability during inclement weather.

## Watch on Hulu

If all you care about is network programming, not local programming (such as news and sports), and you don’t mind watching shows a day or two after they air, then check out the offerings on the Hulu streaming service. Hulu offers recent programming from most of the major broadcast networks, but the shows aren’t streamed in real time as they air on the networks. You browse or search

for the show you want, then choose from a selection of recent episodes. New episodes typically go online within a day or so of their broadcast airing.

To watch Hulu, you need an Internet connection and some sort of streaming media device, such as an Amazon Fire TV, Roku device, or a Smart TV. Hulu is a subscription service, so you'll pay \$5.99 per month.

I recommend Hulu if you don't care about local news, weather, or sports, and if you can wait a day or two before viewing your favorite network shows. Obviously, if local programming is important to you, or if you need to watch your shows when they air, then this is not the best option.

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### More About Hulu

Learn more about Hulu in Chapter 6, "Watching Paid Streaming Services." (And don't confuse basic Hulu with the similar-sounding Hulu + Live TV service; that one does offer programming from local channels, but it costs \$54.99 per month.)

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## Watch via Live Streaming Video Services

If you're going full-bore with the cord-cutting thing, you don't want to pay for your local stations via cable or satellite. If you also have trouble receiving your locals via antenna, there's another option for you: getting local stations over the Internet as part of a streaming video service.

Several streaming video services let you watch live video over the Internet on your TV, computer, phone, or other device. These live streaming video services essentially work like a cable service for your TV, but without a cable box (or cable subscription). You get access to dozens if not hundreds of live cable channels, as well as the local affiliates of the major broadcast networks.

The most popular of these services include AT&T TV, fubo TV, Hulu + Live TV, and YouTube TV, and they all work in a similar fashion. You need an Internet connection, of course, and the faster the better. You also need a streaming media player, such as Amazon Fire TV, Apple TV, or Roku. You connect the media player to your Internet and to your TV (typically via HDMI), and then you're ready to go. Launch the app for the live streaming service and you see a grid of available

channels, like the cable channel guide you're probably used to. Check out what's currently showing and then click to watch a given channel.

Not all local channels are available on all live streaming services in all areas. You're more likely to find your local stations offered if you live in a major metropolitan area; these services often haven't negotiated transmission rights with smaller stations out in the hinterlands.

In addition, you're likely to find only the affiliates of the major broadcast networks on these services. You probably won't find a lot of smaller and independent stations, nor any digital subchannels. (If you're a fan of the classic TV reruns you find in the diginet universe, you're likely out of luck.)

Receiving your local channels over the Internet in this fashion isn't cheap. These live streaming services offer different tiers of service at different pricing levels, just like cable or satellite. Expect to pay around \$50 USD to receive your locals and other channels online, depending on the service and where you live.

The upside of viewing your locals via a live streaming service is that you get service, especially in those areas where antenna reception is variable or non-existent. Also, if you play your cards right, the cost of one of these services could turn out to be a little less than what you're currently paying for cable or satellite service.

The downside of these live streaming services is cost; as with any other subscription service, you're paying for local stations you could otherwise receive for free. In addition, you probably won't be able to receive all your local stations and diginets. And if your Internet connection is slow—well, get used to freezes and stutters while you watch.

I recommend using live streaming services if you want to cut the cable/satellite cord but don't get good over-the-air reception. They're actually very easy to set up and use, and put all your local, cable, and streaming favorites in one place.

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## **More About Live Streaming Services**

Learn more about watching local TV live over the Internet in Chapter 8, "Watching Live Streaming Services."

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## Checklist for Watching Local TV on a Budget

Given all the various ways you access local and national programming these days, which way will save you the most money? Here are some tips and advice for watching local TV when you're on a budget:

- If you get good reception, the lowest-cost approach in the long run is watching your local channels on your TV via antenna. You have a minimal outlay upfront for that antenna, but after that you have zero monthly costs.
- If you don't get good reception, consider subscribing to a live streaming video service. It costs you a little less than cable or satellite, plus you need to pay for a monthly Internet subscription, but it could save you money every month.
- If you want or need to keep your cable or satellite subscription, ask about so-called "skinny" bundles that offer fewer channels for a lower price. You might even be able to find a plan that offers only your local channels; then you can watch all those other cable channels for free (or lower cost) over streaming services online.

Bottom line, there are ways to save money when it comes to watching your local television channels. It might require a little effort on your part to get everything changed over and set up, but it could be worth it in the long run.

### >>> *Go Further*

#### BROADCAST TELEVISION IN CANADA AND THE UK

Broadcast television outside the United States is a little different than what American viewers might be used to.

In Canada, for example, there are fewer national broadcast networks. The government-run Canadian Broadcasting Corporation runs two of them, CBC (English-language) and Ici Radio-Canada Télé (French-language). The major privately run networks include Citytv, CTV, CTV2, Global, TVA, and V. Most local stations are owned by one of the national networks; the networks are available over the air, of course, and also via local cable systems and satellites from Bell TV and Shaw Direct. As in the United States, all Canadian OTA broadcasts are in 720p and 1080i HD.