

# TechTalk



Navigating the world of technology one gadget at a time

## Video on the Go

Volume 7, Number 1

### Introduction

With demands of careers and families pulling you in all directions, it can be difficult to carve out a few minutes for yourself. The ability to take your television programs and movies with you can make it easier to find respite from your everyday responsibilities.



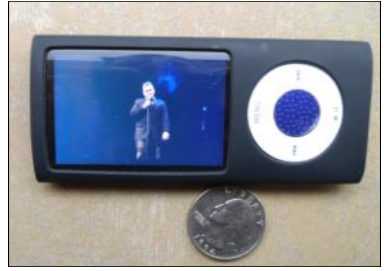
### What kinds of devices display video?

- **Laptop computers** (\$400–\$2,500) are great for playing video. They can tackle most any format you're likely to find and can often store many movies at once. If you're considering a notebook computer, look for one which emphasizes portability. Two categories of laptop computers – **netbook** (\$400–\$600) and **thin and light** (\$600–\$2000) are especially good choices.
- **Tablet devices** (\$500–\$2,000) like the iPad, can be a great choice for watching movies, as current models are slimmer and lighter than most notebook computers. This is in large part because they lack a physical keyboard.
- **Smartphones** (\$100–\$400 with a 2-year contract) like the Motorola Droid and Apple iPhone can display crisp video on their 3.5"–4.0" screens. Their handheld size makes them great traveling companions for cross-country or intercontinental flights, but they are equally well-suited for playing video on your lunch hour.



Thin and light computers like Apple's MacBook Air can easily fit into most briefcases or backpacks.

- **Portable media players (PMPs)** are great for watching music videos or TV episodes. Since smaller screens can be fatiguing for lengthy viewing sessions, consider one with a 3.5" or larger screen if you've got your mind set on *Gone with the Wind*. Popular manufacturers of video-capable PMPs include Archos, Cowon, Apple and Creative. Tech-savvy buyers on a budget may wish to investigate Chinese brands like Onda or Ainol. [\$75-\$400 depending on screen size, brand and functionality]



The fifth generation (5G) iPod Nano portable media player displays video on its crisp, though tiny, 2.2" screen.

### Where do I get TV shows and movies to watch?

There are two general types of video available for watching on the go—streaming and downloadable—and each type has multiple sources.

**Streaming video** requires an Internet connection for the duration of the video you're watching. This is because the flow of video information comes from a remote Internet site in a continuous stream. So long as you have a solid Internet connection, streaming video can be a great way to tap into a wide variety of film and TV programming. Popular streaming sources include:

- **Netflix** ([netflix.com](http://netflix.com)) offers an excellent selection of movies and television shows. Netflix can stream to Mac and Windows laptop computers, iPads and some smartphones including the iPhone. [\$7.99/month for streaming-only]
- **Hulu** ([hulu.com](http://hulu.com)) offers a nice selection of advertising-supported video to watch on your laptop. Upgrading to a paid plan provides access to more programming, and lets you watch on an iPad or iPhone. [free or \$7.99/month depending on plan]
- **ESPN3** ([espn.go.com/espn3/](http://espn.go.com/espn3/)) brings a variety of live and archival sporting events. You can access ESPN3 on your Mac or Windows laptop. For system requirements, see [espn.go.com/espn3/faq#21](http://espn.go.com/espn3/faq#21). [free for many broadband Internet customers]
- **Stream from your home** with a Slingbox ([slingbox.com](http://slingbox.com)) or Monsoon Multimedia ([monsoonmultimedia.com](http://monsoonmultimedia.com)) device.

These gadgets attach to your home network and allow you to watch a streamed version of your home TV signal while you're away. The faster your home's Internet connection, the better the quality of video on your device. Slingbox and Monsoon Multimedia devices work with various notebook computers, tablets and smartphones. [\$120-\$300 for a streaming device]

**Downloadable video** is convenient because it eliminates the need for an Internet connection once you download the video. Also, playback is immune to the brief interruptions and blocky picture that sometimes plague streaming video. In some cases, downloadable video can be transferred from your computer to a portable device (e.g., an iPad or iPhone).

It's not all good news, though. Because downloading video involves transferring large amounts of data, a movie may take a few hours to retrieve. Also, your notebook or media device must have sufficient disk space to store the downloaded files, which may exceed one gigabyte (1GB) in size. Sources for downloadable video include:

- **Apple's iTunes Store** ([apple.com/itunes/download/](http://apple.com/itunes/download/)) allows you to purchase or rent a wide variety of the latest movies, TV shows and music videos. These videos will play on notebook computers (Windows or Mac), iPads, iPhones and certain iPod models. [per-movie charge for rentals and purchases]
- **EZTakes** ([eztakes.com](http://eztakes.com)) is unusual in that its downloadable films are not protected by digital rights management (DRM) software. This means that the videos can be converted and transferred to many different types of devices; they can even be copied to DVD. Their selection favors indie, classic and foreign films over current Hollywood hits. [per-movie charge for rentals and purchases]

**Hybrid services** offer a mix of streaming and downloadable video, depending on whether you rent or buy:

- **Amazon Video on Demand** ([amazon.com/gp/video/ontv/](http://amazon.com/gp/video/ontv/)) has an impressive collection of movies and TV shows. Unfortunately, the service is incompatible with Apple products. [per-movie charge for rentals and purchases]
- **VUDU** ([vudu.com](http://vudu.com)) works on Mac and Windows laptops, though quality is limited to standard definition. This is disappointing, as one of VUDU's key selling points is its large catalog of high-definition movies. [per-movie charge for rentals and purchases]

- **Blockbuster on Demand** ([blockbuster.com/download](http://blockbuster.com/download)) is another popular hybrid choice. Like Amazon's offering, Blockbuster's videos won't play on Apple devices. [per-movie charge for rentals and purchases]
- **Alphaline Entertainment** ([alphaline.roxionow.com](http://alphaline.roxionow.com)) was recently launched by Sears and Kmart. Consumers can rent or buy movies and TV programs to watch on their Windows laptop. Macintosh computers and portable devices are not currently supported. [per-movie charge for rentals and purchases]
- **Movieflix** ([movieflix.com](http://movieflix.com)) has few blockbusters among its 4,000 streaming or downloadable movies. You'll need Real Player or Windows Media player to watch them on your laptop. Other portable devices are not supported. [flat fee of \$11.99/month to access their entire movie database]

### How much does it cost to rent or buy a movie?

Don't expect pricing to be significantly cheaper for Internet-delivered movies than for physical ones, as studios expect you to pay for convenience. Pricing varies by service, but it typically costs about \$4 to rent a movie and \$15-\$20 to buy one (high-definition and new-release movies may cost more).

### Conclusion

A decade ago, portable DVD players brought the ability to watch video away from home to many for the first time. This tradition continues today with a wide variety of portable devices and an ever-increasing number of services providing streaming and downloadable videos.

If you have questions, comments or suggestions, you can visit me at the Reference Desk, contact me via email ([moetting@hinsdalelibrary.info](mailto:moetting@hinsdalelibrary.info)), or call me at 630.986.1976 ext. 225.

An archive of Tech Talk issues can be found at: [tinyurl.com/HPL-techtalk](http://tinyurl.com/HPL-techtalk).

Mike Oetting, Reference Librarian  
1/31/2011



20 East Maple St.  
Hinsdale IL 60521  
630-986-1976  
[www.hinsdalelibrary.info](http://www.hinsdalelibrary.info)  
[reference@hinsdalelibrary.info](mailto:reference@hinsdalelibrary.info)