

# Streaming Overtakes Cable in Historic Viewing Shift

For the first time in U.S. television history, more content viewing takes place through streaming than cable and broadcast TV in overall viewership.

According to Nielsen's May data, streaming accounted for 44.8% of total television viewing, edging out the combined 44.1% from cable (24.1%) and broadcast (20.1%). The shift signals a major change in how Americans consume entertainment in the home.

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Nielsen's data tracks only TV screen viewership, not phones, tablets or computers, highlighting a critical transition in mainstream household habits. Over the past four years, TV streaming has surged by 71%, reflecting widespread migration away from traditional cable bundles.

YouTube leads the streaming pack with 12.5% of all TV viewership, a 120% increase since 2021. Netflix follows at 7.5%, trailed by Disney+ (5.0%), Amazon Prime Video (3.5%), and several free or ad-supported platforms like Roku Channel (2.5%), Tubi (2.2%) and Pluto TV (2.2%).

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This trend carries broader implications. Traditional cable's "affirmative action" model, where unpopular channels survive due to bundled carriage fees, is collapsing. Only 55 million households still subscribe to cable or satellite, down sharply from its peak. As older viewers exit the market and streaming becomes more user-friendly, cable's influence continues to shrink.

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Streaming, in contrast, operates on a merit-based model. Consumers pay only for content they choose, forcing platforms to compete on quality and appeal. Ad-supported free streaming options like YouTube, Pluto TV, and Roku Channel now make up a significant portion of the market, suggesting a future in which entertainment thrives on demand, not distribution deals.

The shift is already hammering legacy media. Channels like CNN, MTV and Comedy Central are rapidly losing relevance and revenue as cable subscriptions vanish. Streaming giants like Netflix maintain dominance through consistent, broad-appeal content, while less competitive services bleed cash and face consolidation or closure.

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As the entertainment market continues to correct itself, expect ad-driven, merit-based content to grow in popularity, replacing the outdated model where consumers paid for dozens of channels they never watched.

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