

A Prime Rip-Off

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Like many TV viewers, I subscribe to streaming services to obtain a wider variety of programs. But mainly, I subscribe to avoid watching advertisements. In 1961, Daniel J. Boorstin summed up my dislike for TV ads, “When the gods wish to punish us, they make us believe our own advertising.” Spoken over fifty years ago, the statement still rings true.

In discussing this gripe with friends, some say they like the ads because many of them are entertaining, even funny. I watch and listen, trying to get in the mood when a commercial comes on. Most of the ads are not close to being humorous, with many of them denigrating some segment of our population. As one example, my category of the human species: WASM, the white Anglo-Saxon male.

Putting that observation aside for the moment, and back to my principal reason for writing this diatribe: Subscribers to a TV streaming service are increasingly being ripped off.

As the title of this report suggests, the rip-off leader thus far is Amazon Prime. And other streaming companies, such as Netflix and Hulu, are now knocking at your door (your cable TV unit) for more dough. The result is increased charges, beyond the monthly fee we fork-out for “pay TV.”

Streaming TV Fees

Netflix is considered the leader in the streaming industry. It began as a mail-based rental company in 1997 and launched its online streaming service in 2011. Initial monthly fees were \$9.99 (with some limited options). What a deal! I could not wait to become a customer. No more ads. No more anti-climax interruptions to the climaxes in movies that my family and I watched.

It was like being in a movie theater with a small screen and self-popped popcorn. We had access to viewing---eventually---hundreds of movies for about the same price that we paid for one film.

As a long-watching fan of movies, I was happy that I could spend my later years watching no-ad movies on television. Although I did miss going to a movie theater: The large screen, the surround-sound, the gallon-size cups of Coke, the popcorn bags---big as a grocery store sack; candy bars that dwarfed those small sized things we buy at the grocery store.

Sacrifices are a part of life. I could forecast into my senior years that the only downside to this new part of my couch potato existence would be having to replace our worn-out couch more often. Now, about those prices.

Netflix has raised its prices on a regular basis since 2011. Our cable TV fees are part of our condo fees, so they remain somewhat hidden from us. I checked online for Netflix’s latest subscription fees. They range from seven dollars to twenty-three dollars, depending on the quality of the steaming material.

Admission tickets to movie theaters vary, based on the day, the time of day, the age of the purchaser, and the popularity of the movie. Over the past few months, I have paid between nine and fifteen dollars for a movie at a local theater.

Streaming Advertisements

Currently, not only do steaming companies charge subscribers a fee for watching their programs, they have begun to insert advertisements into their offerings. During the past few weeks, I discovered (and these charges are not static):

- Prime's offering of "Forensic Files": In order to watch, I had to pay \$16.99 for a season, in addition to Prime's monthly fee of around \$14.99. Grumbling and paying, I tuned-in to an episode. Twelve minutes into the program, Prime inserted an advertisement! To add insult to injury, it played another ad at the end of the episode.
- "Bull," a family favorite: such a deal, only \$5.99 a month. ...Along with ads.
- During other streaming programs, I used my remote to fast forward past the ads. No dice. My attempts resulted in either the ad continuing to play, or exiting from the streaming program without my permission.

Popping Profits

Of course, most everyone favors companies turning a profit. They help keep bread on our tables. And critics of my grumbles can counter with, "You're not forced to subscribe to Netflix, Prime, or any other streaming service."

True, and at this stage of my life, I have accepted the fact that advertisements are a never-ending, ever-present part of living in a modern society. Nonetheless, I had hoped that the streaming services would offer a respite to the intrusion of commercials during my couch potato getaways.

They still do, as long as subscribers are selective about what they click-on. But the idea of ad-free movies---supposedly paid-for with our monthly subscription fee---is under assault. Streaming services want more of our popcorn.