

Digital Cable Compatibility: CableCARD-Ready Devices

FCC Consumer Facts

Background

If you subscribe to a digital cable service, you probably rent a set-top box from your cable operator. Did you know that you could buy a CableCARD-ready (sometimes called “plug and play” or “digital cable-ready”) device instead? If you purchase a television or set-top box that is CableCARD-ready, you can watch cable television without renting a set-top box from your cable operator. All you need to do is purchase a CableCARD-ready device (such as a television or set-top box) from your nearest retailer and insert a CableCARD into the device. You can rent a CableCARD from your cable television company. CableCARDS typically cost between \$2 and \$4 per month. New CableCARD rules went into effect on August 8, 2011, to make it easier for cable subscribers to obtain and use CableCARDS.

Retail CableCARD-Ready Devices

A retail CableCARD-ready device is a television, set-top box, or device that connects to a personal computer that you can plug directly into your cable system to receive cable channels without having to lease a set-top box from your cable operator. As most cable operators provide some or all of their channels in digital format, old (analog) cable-ready television sets no longer work for all channels.

Benefits of Retail CableCARD Devices

- Many consumers prefer the convenience (and cost savings) of being able to receive their cable programming without having to lease a set-top box from their cable operator.
- You will be able to take your CableCARD-ready device anywhere in the country and know it will work on cable systems offering digital services – all that is needed is a cable operator-provided CableCARD.
- Your CableCARD-ready device may have features that the set-top box the cable operator leases does not, such as access to Internet video or advanced searching and recording functions.

Will It Work Like the Box I Lease from My Cable Operator?

Retail devices equipped with CableCARDS allow you to receive “linear” video programming – i.e., pre-scheduled programming that includes premium and high-definition services that you may subscribe to – but they typically will not provide access to most other interactive (two-way) services like video-on-demand. If your operator uses a technology called “switched digital video” or SDV, you may need to obtain a separate device called a “tuning adapter” to receive some of your channels. Typically, this device is provided at no additional charge.

Your device manufacturer, retailer or cable operator can tell you if video-on-demand is available on a particular device.

Availability of CableCARD-Ready Devices

CableCARD-ready set-top boxes and devices that connect to a personal computer are currently in retail stores and available for sale on the Internet. To verify that you are buying a legitimate CableCARD-ready device, ask your retailer if it is “digital cable-ready” and look for the “CableCARD-ready” or “digital cable-ready” label. Manufacturers that use this label must meet certain technical standards and must complete a testing and verification process.

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Setting Up a CableCARD-Ready Device

After you purchase a CableCARD-ready device, you will need to obtain a CableCARD from your cable operator. Some cable operators currently require one of their own technicians to install the CableCARD for you. By November 1, 2011, all cable operators will be required to allow you to install the CableCARD in your CableCARD-ready device yourself as long as that device comes with instructions on how to install the CableCARD.

Consumers' CableCARD Rights

New rules went into effect on August 8, 2011 that clarified and expanded rights for owners of CableCARD-ready devices. You have the right to: receive accurate information from your cable operator about CableCARDS; install your CableCARD yourself; have a technician show up with the correct number and type of CableCARDS if you opt for professional installation; and receive a discount from a package price if you choose to use your own CableCARD-ready device rather than lease the operator's set-top box. For more information on your rights, see the CableCARD Rights Guide at www.fcc.gov/guides/cablecard-know-your-rights.

Problems with CableCARDS

If you want to file a complaint about CableCARDS or other equipment leased from your cable provider, click on www.fcc.gov/complaints.

Viewing High-Definition Programming

CableCARD-ready devices equipped with CableCARDS are able to access all of the high-definition programming other than video-on-demand that your cable operator offers.

For More Information

For more information about DTV in general, visit our DTV website at www.dtv.gov. You may also call our Consumer Center at: 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322) voice, or 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322) TTY.

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