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An Amagi Point of View
November 2021

FAST: A quantum leap for streaming media

Explore the growing universe of free ad supported streaming TV and the unique value propositions of some of the current popular streamers



As internet exposure increases and audiences are drawn from traditional television to streaming platforms, broadcasters need adaptive solutions to sustain themselves in the market. Since visual media consumption is becoming increasingly diverse, with more options for consumers, broadcasters face more competition. Such new competition, however, cannot be dealt with conventionally.

For example, as consumers subscribe to more and more platforms, they're beginning to realize that they don't actually consume all of the content that is being offered to them. While subscription services are great for discovering a niche or experiencing popular shows, they are not too great for people who have already found their niche and would like to dig deeper now.



Consumers are embracing FAST

FAST or free ad-supported streaming television is a solution that combines the best of both worlds and bridges the gap between consumers and content creators. As the name suggests, FAST is free to access, meaning there are no subscription fees for consuming content.

Platforms such as Netflix, which charge a regular fee, have a predefined content library. However, this limits consumer access to the content included in the subscription, thereby restricting consumption. Even when a subscriber may consume only a fraction of the content available on the platform, the payment is essentially made for the entire catalog.

As per a survey conducted by the Maru Group in 2021, 49% of the surveyed people believed that FAST services were easy-to-use, and 39% said that the quality of FAST TV content was at par with traditional television programs.

FAST as an alternative offers a two-fold advantage to consumers.

- First, it eliminates the need to make fixed payments at regular intervals.
- Second, it removes restrictions on the consumer by allowing them unhindered access to a wide variety of content.

Let's take the example of Disney+. Fans of the Marvel Cinematic Universe have no choice today but to subscribe to the platform's entire content portfolio, even if all they do is consume Marvel-based content. Moreover, for direct-to-OTT releases, even premium subscribers end up paying extra, as was the case with *Black Widow*.

Niche channels through FAST, on the other hand, allow consumers to watch more of what they like without incurring the associated costs.



What's in it for traditional broadcasters?

Broadcasters leverage FAST by reaching a market where customers are already present. Since broadcasters now compete with streaming platforms, a free content consumption destination is a significant selling point. Apart from the pricing factor, free ad supported streaming platforms allow broadcasters to become more efficient in their operations.

Since the exercise of delivering content to the viewer is in the digital sphere, several processes can be automated, making ad support more efficient. Web-based platforms using programmatic ad selling have been an essential part of online content for a long time and are now an asset to broadcasters.

As the process of selling ad space is automated, broadcasters gain control of their advertisement inventory and help them deploy special features such as dynamic spot pricing for better revenues.

A survey by Hub Entertainment found that 41% of viewers preferred FAST services against 33% who preferred paid services and 26% who preferred tiered services.

***Viewers were asked what they would choose if the content was identical.**

What's in it for digital first content brands?

One of the most alluring aspects of Free Ad Supported Streaming TV (FAST) today is its growing consumer appeal and the ability to deliver niche content. More and more content creators are producing high-quality content in a niche of their choice for FAST platforms, and delighting their audiences, opening up opportunities to scale their ad revenues.

Through FAST, creators are now launching channels on specialized areas of interest and earning sustainable revenues. For example, Tastemade, a leading content player focused on food and travel-based content, launched its broadcast-grade linear channel with program scheduling to platforms such as Peacock, Xumo, and Redbox. Sensical [recently launched](#) a kids-exclusive channel on Vizio. Independently, Sensical TV has also launched three kids' exclusive channels on Vizio for augmenting safe streaming for kids.

Cinedigm and Elvis Presley Enterprises are creating a dedicated channel for Elvis Presley's music. Multiple YouTube channels now are capitalizing on FAST services to expand their audience base. Pinkfong, a kids' content channel is a successful example of the same. It boasts of a YouTube subscriber base of 52 million and is now available for streaming on The Roku Channel.

Big media houses like [A+E networks](#) and AMC are streaming several FAST channels and building up their portfolio to attract a niche, dedicated audience. For instance, A+E Networks' Lively Place and Crime 360 are some popular channels streaming on various FAST platforms.

What's more, major free ad supported streaming services have also started focusing on offering local language content in the regions they operate in. Investing in the consumption potential of the Hispanic diaspora, Univision [launched PrendeTV \(in the US\)](#) in March this year, purely driven by Spanish language content. Pluto TV in the US offers around 50 Spanish language channels that account for [over 20% of Pluto's total channels in that region.](#)

This further opens up massive opportunities for content creators.

Key players in the FAST industry

The FAST industry is witnessing just as much competition as any other digital media platform. The number of players in the market is rapidly increasing owing to the recent gold rush for consumer data that can be used to create lasting entertainment models through intelligent advertisement. It is only natural that the most influential players in media are already making a move to capture market share before it floods.

As FAST platforms rise in popularity, global giants such as Amazon, NBC, and Samsung have entered the market with their iterations.

To get a better understanding of the FAST platform landscape, explore some of the best options available in the market right now.



IMDb TV – Amazon's expansion plan



Although the content offering of IMDb is not at par with some other players in the market, it still is a popular choice for consumers owing to a few major titles such as Judge Judy and Hell's Kitchen. IMDb TV supports multiple devices, including connected TVs, casting devices, and several mobile devices. The platform is also backed by the eponymous rating website that has enjoyed a dedicated following for over a decade now.

Since IMDb TV comes under the umbrella of Amazon, which also owns Prime Video, it does offer significant major titles. The platform primarily focuses on older content, documentaries, and interviews.

IMDb TV broadcasts several major titles and includes support for multiple devices to consume content. However, it has one of the smallest content libraries among FAST services

Peacock



Peacock is NBCUniversal's attempt to grab viewers wherever they are. It is one of the most popular FAST services and follows a hybrid approach with both paid and free tiers for users. A simple sign-up without payment can give users access to over 20,000 titles across films, TV shows, documents, and more.

The platform gained popularity owing to major titles such as The Office and Parks and Recreation, which were previously only available through subscription-based services,

Peacock offers some of the biggest TV show titles and dedicated channels for major programs, including WWE. However, NBCU owns several premium content properties which are still not available on the platform, which is a missed opportunity.

Pluto TV



Pluto TV is one of the most viewed FAST services in the US. The platform has expanded to several European and South American countries, and owing to the content rights ViacomCBS, is gaining international recognition. Initially owned by Viacom, Pluto expanded its library significantly when Viacom merged with CBS, gaining additional titles from media houses such as Paramount.

The platform owns popular brands such as MTV and Comedy Central, which have played a critical part in its significance over the previous years. The platform enjoys a 14% market share in the FAST space and is rapidly gaining viewers worldwide.

Pluto TV is available across multiple devices, including unconventional entertainment devices such as gaming consoles. But it lacks high resolution for live content, with lags often reported.

The Roku Channel



Roku is also one of the most popular FAST services coming in at a close second with 13% of the market share. The service is available on Roku's streaming media player and its smart television.

The platform has a free-content library of over 100 channels and includes viewer favorites such as 24 and Hoarders. It also includes over 7,000 ad-supported movies and episodes from major partner content creators, including Hasbro, Lionsgate, and Mattel.

The ad-supported streaming service includes leading titles from the Viacom library, including major channels for news, sports, movies, and music. But the service is limited to Roku hardware and compatible Samsung TVs and Amazon Fire TV devices in the United States, reducing accessibility.

Xumo



Xumo is an ad-supported television service owned by Comcast which is primarily focused on TV, movies, and sports channels. It offers a total of 180 channels across multiple categories and includes several major titles, including Memento and Spotlight.

Even though Xumo offers a decent amount of sports channels, it still lacks the feature of live TV broadcasting for most sports channels, which requires a sports streaming subscription.

Xumo is available on multiple devices, including mobile, tablet, and can also be accessed through the web and streaming platforms like Amazon Fire TV and Roku. But the service is known to have a very high number of advertisements which dilutes the user experience.

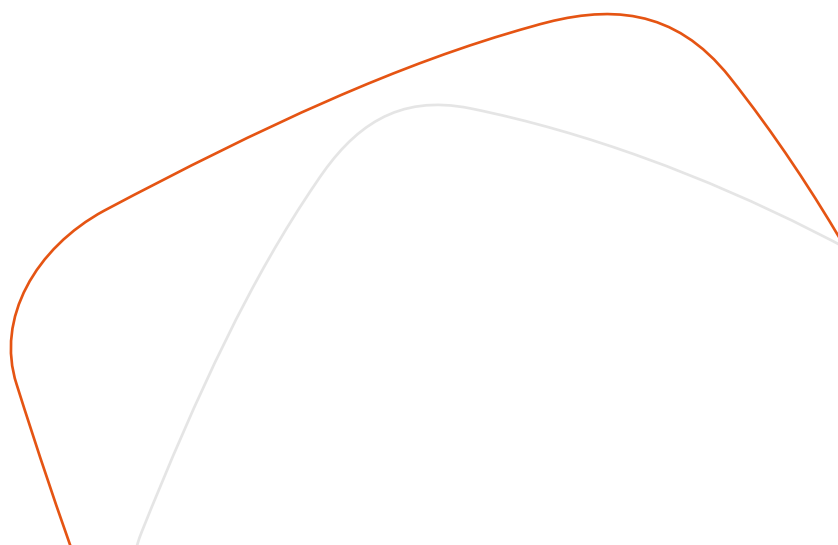
Tubi



Tubi is a free ad-supported streaming service owned by the Fox Corporation. The service offers over 20,000 film and TV titles, including viewer favorites such as Memento, Catch Me If You Can, Charlotte's Web, and more.

Unlike most other counterparts, Tubi does not offer a paid tier to customers for premium content. Therefore, the entire content library of Tubi is available for free without having to subscribe to a service.

Tubi provides additional features such as creating watchlists and installing parental controls. However, the UI for the platform is seemingly underwhelming, as reported by users.



STIRR



Stirr is a FAST service owned by Sinclair Broadcast Group, which is one of the largest broadcasters in the world. It offers over 50 ad-supported channels across several genres, including news, sports, and entertainment.

Since the Sinclair Broadcast Group owns more than 190 channel stations, it uses FAST as a means to increase viewership and diversify its media interests. The service is also known for hosting several independent channels related to science and technology.

Stirr hosts niche channels catering to very specific audiences, a hallmark of good FAST programming that caters to niche audiences without high costs attributed to them. But the service is often difficult to navigate, making content discovery a challenge, particularly with the sheer amount of content available currently.

Vizio Watch Free+



Vizio is a leading connected television set and audio devices manufacturer in the US that launched its own version of ad-supported television. It offers this service through its SmartCast devices on Vizio televisions.

The FAST service supports over 100 live television channels for news, sports, and movies. The service also offers content from contemporary independent creators with channels like Fail Army.

The service can automatically be used with Vizio devices without the need to purchase additional hardware. But it is only available on devices manufactured by Vizio, thus limiting access.

SportsTribal TV



SportsTribal TV is a sports-oriented FAST service that offers dedicated channels for league sports, video gaming, and channels that broadcast exclusive content for particular teams.

SportsTribal TV is available on multiple devices such as mobile, web, and connected TVs, as well as leading gaming consoles.

The platform offers channels that are dedicated to specific teams for better fanbase engagement. But the service has a limited content library currently.

Prende TV



Prende TV is a FAST service owned by the Spanish language broadcaster Univision. The service is focused on attracting Hispanic audiences in the US and offers only Spanish language content.

The service offers translated movies and TV shows as well as subtitled works. It has more than 30 channels and approximately 10,000 hours of content in its library.

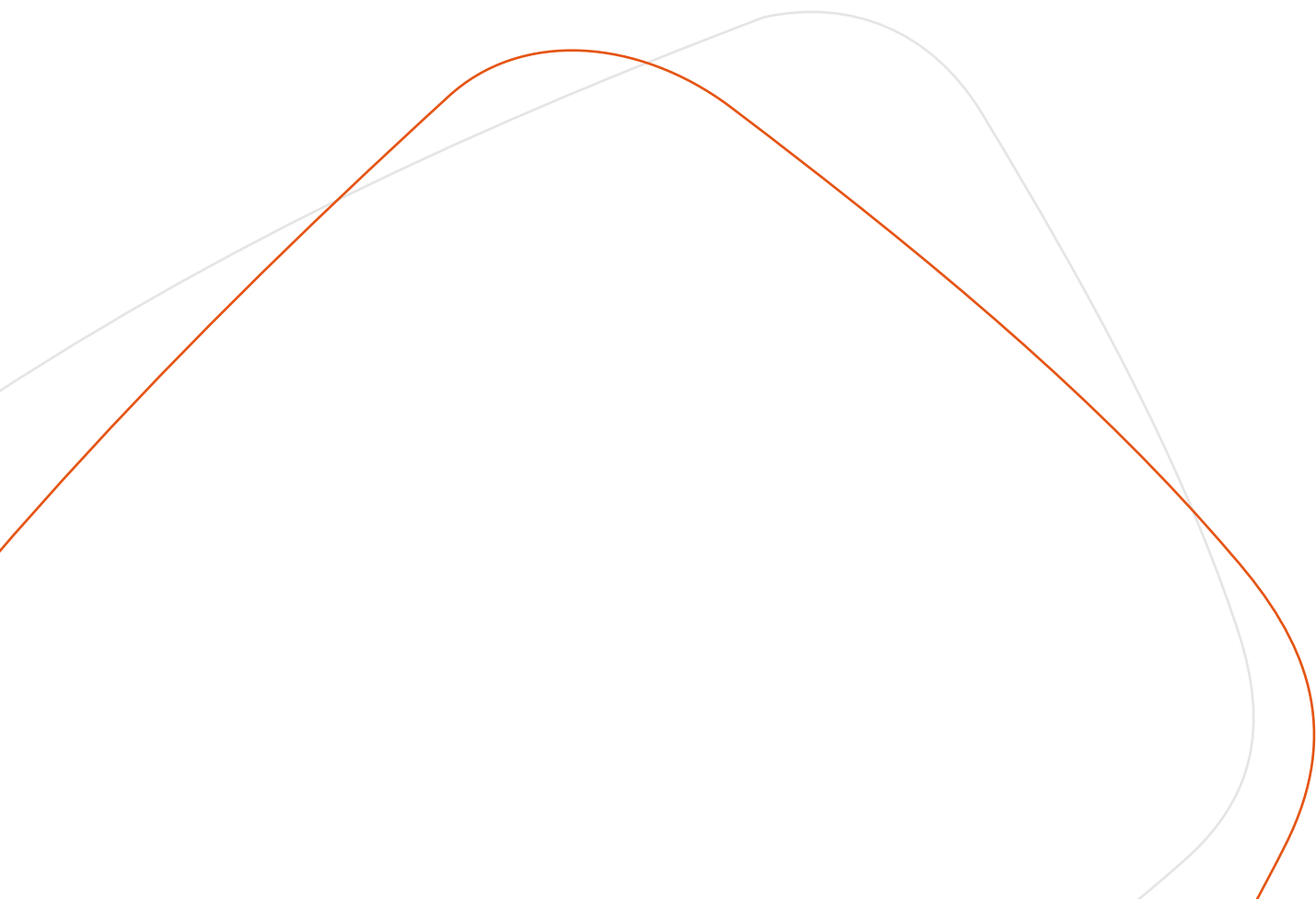
The service helps content creators connect with Spanish-speaking audiences, improving content discovery and promoting diversity. The user interface for the service is known to lag in some instances.

The rise of the free ad supported streaming world

The origin of FAST platforms can be traced back to the inception of YouTube, however, the industry gained official status around 2014. The FAST service has the most viewership in the US. However, it has been gaining popularity in Europe and the APAC region due to the appeal of niche content with a predetermined amount of ads.



The concept of ad-supported television was developed to provide television access to consumers without the conventional norms that surround it. As internet exposure grew, the industry gained momentum and eventually generated a viable income stream for content creators.



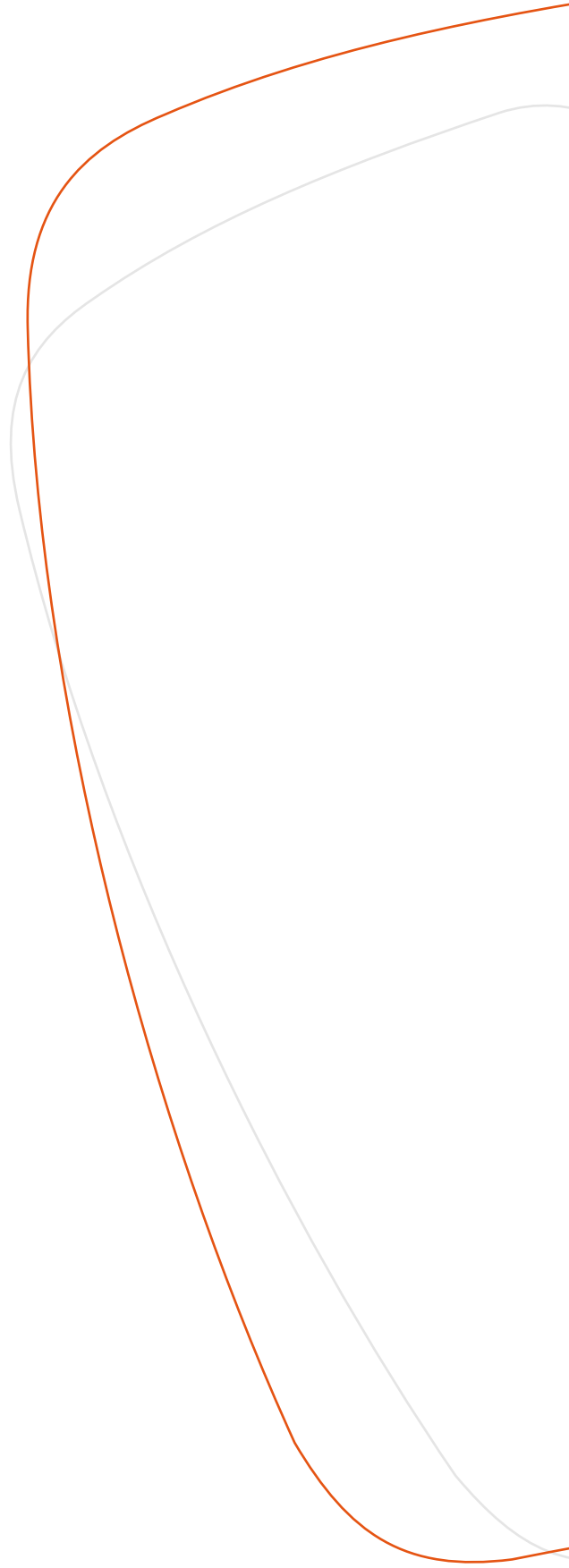
The way forward

As more broadcasters move to the cloud, FAST platforms become viable competitors in the online content consumption space. Since users are migrating to web-based content rapidly, adapting to the changing dynamics of media is imperative for content creators.

While subscription-based platforms have been immensely popular for the previous couple of years, the increasing popularity of FAST is arguably the best possible time.

Through advanced analytics and consumer behavior studies, broadcasters provide intelligent ad spaces, allowing brands to gain an insight into the consumer in real-time. This improves ad campaigns making ad spaces more valuable, and the requirement for advertisements to support the platform incidentally reduces.

FAST has significantly improved content discovery helping content creators develop content for multiple geographies through script translation and subtitles.



Innovations underway

FAST is catching up fast with other streaming services, and thanks to innovations and improvements in the works, this market is poised for sustained success.

Formats and quality: One of the challenges in this space today is the video quality. The majority of FAST services do not offer high fidelity for their content. Where competition such as Netflix offers 4K resolution for videos, most FAST services are restricted to standard HD videos. However, with tech enablers such as Amagi providing 4K UHD cloud playout, we are witnessing a slow but steady stream of content owners creating UHD, HDR content for the free ad supported platforms.

Content: The quality of content on a large number of FAST channels is still not at par with streaming and video-on-demand services. This diminishes viewership as high-quality content is restricted to paid platforms, giving consumers little incentive other than the cost factor to migrate to a FAST service. However, with many leading services planning to infuse more original titles into their package, this is also bound to change over time.

Ad experiences: The biggest conundrum on FAST is how can platforms and content owners balance the lower ad load with the increasing supply of ads. How do they continue to attract audiences as well as ad revenues? Ad sales strategies of platforms and content producers are seeing a sea change for the good with the rise of new, unintrusive and contextual ad formats such as Dynamic Brand Insertion, Graphics overlays ads and contextual video ads. Amagi has recently launched these new ad formats that allow content owners to deliver unintrusive and intuitive ad viewing experiences for consumers, thus attracting ad spends. All these without diluting the most attractive proposition of FAST: low ad loads.

Fast forward!

FAST has created a niche in the digital entertainment market; with dedicated viewership, sustainable revenue models, and scalable operations, the solution and technology are sound. This exciting market holds excellent opportunities for broadcasters and media brands worldwide, providing them with the right tools to tackle the paid and on-demand competitors.

While on-demand and subscription models have garnered a handsome consumer base, FAST is catching up quickly, giving broadcasters enough incentives to move their content to a consumer-rich environment on the internet, and in the process, preparing them for the future of content consumption.

Thrive with us!

Reach out to us to see how you can thrive on the FAST lane

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About Amagi

Amagi is a next-gen media tech company that provides cloud broadcast and streaming TV solutions to TV networks, content owners and streaming TV platforms. Amagi enables content owners to launch, distribute and monetize live linear channels on Free-Ad-Supported TV and SVOD platforms. Amagi also offers 24x7 cloud managed services bringing simplicity, advanced automation, and transparency to the entire broadcast operations for traditional TV networks. Amagi delivers 500+ channels with deployments in over 40 countries. Amagi has offices in New York, Los Angeles, London, Singapore, New Delhi and Bangalore.

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