

# Stop going back and forth to the movie store



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Remember the good old days back in the 1980s? With no cell phones, no Internet and no computer at home, our main electronic form of entertainment was swinging by Blockbuster on the way home from work Friday afternoon to pick up a movie on

VHS tape. The next day we had to put the tape back into the car and then remember to drop it off at Blockbuster to avoid the brutal late fees.

Over the years I rented hundreds of movies and paid hundreds in late fees. Blockbuster was draconian in that area. Even if I had put the movie back into the return box at 12:02 p.m., they would still hit me up for the money next time I returned.

In the 1990s I grew weary of Blockbuster's lack of choice and how fast the new releases ran out no matter when I got there during the week or day.

By 2000 I had all I could stand with Blockbuster here at

the Brenham store. Even with four check-out counters installed they only had one person working a single register.

The line on Friday nights would be four to eight people deep and my fussing did no good. When block-

buster.com started renting DVDs through their Web site, I was all over it.

This meant no more walking up and down those movie aisles trying to beat other yahoos to the movie I wanted to see. No more waiting for rude and tattooed Blockbuster workers extorting me for late fees or making me wait in line while the other employees wandered around the store waiting for their next smoking break to start.

All I had to do was browse over to [www.blockbuster.com](http://www.blockbuster.com), pick out a couple of DVD movies, and they arrived in my mailbox in a day or two. After watching them on my own schedule since there were no

late fees when you order them online, I just put them back into their postage paid envelopes and send them back the same way.

This online movie service has kept me out of the Blockbuster store for over five years now and my blood pressure had remained low since then. Life is good.

Now that we are in a cost cutting mode, that \$20 a month blockbuster.com debit from our account had to be re-evaluated. At the start of this year I signed up for an account with their competition at [NetFlix.com](http://NetFlix.com) to try to save a little money with their entry level DVD rental package.

I have been so pleased with [NetFlix](http://NetFlix.com) that I dropped the Blockbuster account, ending a 20-year rental relationship and I never looked back. With all those hassles over the years with Blockbuster I shed no tears when I read they were on the edge of bankruptcy. What goes around comes around when customer service goes out the door.

[NetFlix](http://NetFlix.com) has over 10 million subscribers choosing from over

100,000 DVD titles that are distributed from 58 distribution centers all over the United States. The DVDs are delivered 97 percent of the time in only one business day and there are no late fees.

If you cannot wait that one day [NetFlix](http://NetFlix.com) has over 12,000 movies that you can instantly watch on your computer or selected DVRs.

This instant view option sealed the deal for me. During a slow day at work a couple of months ago I logged into [NetFlix.com](http://NetFlix.com) at my downtown office and tried out their instant view capability by watching *Good Fellas* on my 19-inch widescreen LCD computer monitor.

Since my DSL link has a smoking fast speed of 6 Mbps, the movie played flawlessly with good clarity and no pauses or loss of picture.

The next thing I knew Ray Liotta's character was entering the witness protection program, it was after 5 p.m., and I felt a little guilty for watching a movie during the work day. I

wrote it off as research time for an article.

I have watched a couple of movies at home on my laptop with the video streaming over our Texas Broadband link which is around 1 Mbps. The download rate runs at around 700 Kbps and the [NetFlix](http://NetFlix.com) player had to stop a couple of times to buffer up, but I let it and then the movie played OK.

If this [NetFlix](http://NetFlix.com) streaming stoppage happens to you, then I suggest you just hit pause and go get a snack while the buffer builds up. Odds are after a five to 10-minute break, that buffer will prevent any further pauses in the movie.

Signing up with [NetFlix.com](http://NetFlix.com) is simple and all you have to do is pick one of their rental plans to fit your viewing needs.

On the cheap you can start with the \$4.99 a month rate which gets you one DVD twice a month. The next step up is the \$8.99 monthly charge delivering one DVD at a time but you can exchange as many during the month as you wish, which is the option we went with.

There are other plans that allow you to have two and three DVDs at one time and they run \$13.99 and \$16.99 respectively.

A couple of months later we added the \$2 a month fee to be able to get Blu-Ray discs to

see those really clear and crisp movies like "Quantum of Solace." Nothing beats a Blu-Ray movie playing on a high definition LCD big screen.

Since [NetFlix](http://NetFlix.com) has a computer link to the U.S. Postal Service, they know you have returned the movie the instant the USPS scans their postage paid envelope into the system. [NetFlix](http://NetFlix.com) will ship the next DVD in you queue just as the returned DVD hits our Brenham post office.

[NetFlix's](http://NetFlix.com) movie queue management is neat since all you have to do is click and drag your top choice to the head of the queue for next DVD shipment. If you are on the single DVD plan like we are, be careful moving movies you like to the top of the queue ahead of your spouse's favorite pick. Taking turns works the best. Trust me on that one.

Bottom line: Gone are the days of running back and forth to the movie store now that we have [NetFlix.com](http://NetFlix.com) enabling us to browse our favorite DVDs online and having them shipped free directly to our homes.

Next week's column: Zazzle.  
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