



Roger Ebert's Legacy Includes Streaming Movie Advocacy and Working with New Technology

By Orry Main
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Robert Ebert, film critic who reviewed movies for 46 years for the Chicago Sun-Times, passed, on Thursday in Chicago after a battle with cancer.

In an article that Ebert wrote in the Sun Times online paper, in June last year, entitled "Movies don't stream themselves", he states that he was a subscriber to Netflix, Hulu and Fandor, and that he also rented movies from Vudu and Amazon. He dismissed iTunes because it didn't work well on his machine.



His question to readers was in regard to how they felt about streaming revenue surpassing DVD sales revenue in 2012. It seems that in his article he is alluding to the possibility that the cost of monthly streaming may eventually rise with the plummeting of the other ways people consume movies.

He discusses the introduction of on-demand video where HBO would take orders over the phone and play the movies via video cassette playback machines, this, all pre-DVD days.

In terms of where video on demand has evolved digitally, Ebert felt that Netflix and Fandor delivered "flawless service," and mentioned that Hulu was freezing on occasion during some of the evening hours.

He was a frequenter of instantwatcher.com, a site that recommends Netflix content, and would also send a Tweet and Facebook update with his own "daily streamer" suggestions just before he turned in for the night. From looking at Facebook stats he discovered that most of his fans were users of Netflix and many never heard of Fandor.

Ebert's concern with DVD sales declining

As discussed in the article, DVD makers often spend a great deal of money on restoring classic films, something that will be less likely to occur as time goes on.

“If DVD sales decline, film restoration declines right along with them.”

Netflix and Amazon accounted for a lot of DVD sales at one time, but of course with Netflix changing their service plan forcing many people into streaming and with Amazon offering streaming, DVD sales plummeted, and continue to plummet. Video stores also contributed to many sales of DVDs but we all know where that business is going.

It makes me wonder if “House of Cards” (the Kevin Spacey version), the “exclusive” (apparently a newly defined word in the streaming age) Netflix title, now available on Amazon on DVD, will see many sales.

Fandor.com

Ebert discussed Fandor, fondly. Fandor is a streaming service that has a 50/50 income split with independent filmmakers. “That shows where its heart is,” said Ebert. They specialize in indie films, classics, foreign films, shorts, documentaries, and silent films.

He likes the idea that Fandor includes a collection of films from all different eras, some from 1922, 1952, up to 2011, that people haven’t heard of. “It’s nice to know that a legendary figure like Mark Rappaport, whose films I reviewed in first run, can still share in his revenue.”