

SAMSUNG Ads

Decoding FAST

A comprehensive guide
to the Free Ad-Supported
Streaming Landscape





Introduction

Free Ad-Supported Streaming TV (FAST) has quickly taken hold as an important viewing option for streaming TV viewers. As one of the fastest growing viewing options, FAST is attracting new talent, content, and distributors. With consumers and content moving to FAST, it has become a hot topic of discussion among advertisers, but there are still as many questions as answers. This paper will offer specific details about FAST to answer many of the biggest questions including: What is FAST, How big is FAST, What Content is on FAST, and What does the future hold for FAST? Our goal is to help media buyers make informed decisions about why and how FAST should be added to media plans.



FAST: A Rapidly Transforming Landscape

The landscape of FAST is undergoing a transformative shift, challenging the prevailing misconception that it serves as a repository for older, less-valuable content. Across the hundreds of FAST channels offering single-title content, more than one-third is programs that are still in production and 46% are programs that first aired since 2020. FAST encompasses a diverse set of programming genres including TV dramas, sitcoms, theatrical movies, music & music videos, news & opinion, and sports. News has emerged as a rapidly growing genre expanding into live broadcasts of national and local newscasts. Sports channels are embracing both niche and major league offerings. And as the audiences watching longtail over-the-air and pay TV networks shrink, we're seeing a surge in live stream simulcasts from TV networks, adding a new dimension to FAST's profile.

What is FAST?

FAST stands for Free Ad-Supported Streaming Television. It refers to services that primarily provide free linear streaming channels that viewers join in-progress. Cord-cutting, rising costs for streaming services, frustration with the process of finding on-demand content, and out-of-the-box built-in services have all driven consumer adoption of FAST. Viewers are looking for quality entertainment at lower costs; FAST offers lean-back, no-cost entertainment with a curated set of channels across a variety of formats and program genres, from TV programs to movies and original content.

FAST services include Tubi, Pluto TV, and Samsung TV Plus among others. An in-depth, updated look at all the services from FASTMaster, Gavin Bridge, is available at: <https://fastmaster.substack.com>

How Does FAST Work?

From the consumer perspective, FAST is increasingly becoming TV. A key reason why FAST feels like traditional TV is that it follows the same structure. Channels are linearly scheduled with content via a programmer or scheduler, have regular ad breaks, and are joined in-progress when the viewer accesses it¹.

At the same time, linear TV and FAST are coming together in different ways. FAST services like Samsung TV Plus are incorporating livestreams of over-the-air channels alongside their FAST channels; Virtual MVPDs like YouTube TV and fubo are including FAST channels within their linear lineups, and distributors like Comcast are incorporating Xumo FAST channels into their X1 set-top box and channel guide.

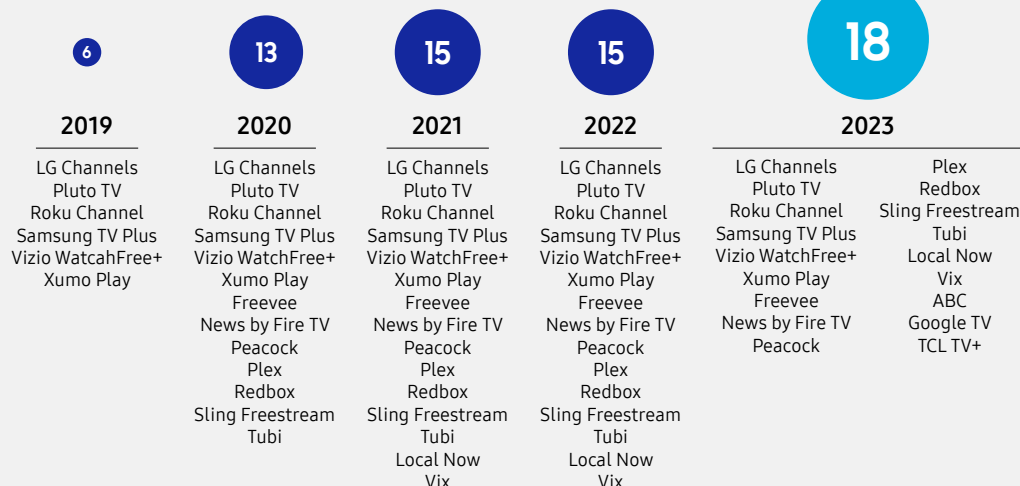
Monetization of FAST comes via advertising. In general, FAST ad breaks are shorter than those of broadcast and cable TV², which makes the format a better consumer experience and attractive to users. Advertisements look the same, with the same major brands advertising in FAST, using the same ad creatives they use on linear and ad-supported streaming.

How Big is FAST?

FAST continues to grow in the United States. From a usage standpoint, multiple sources have demonstrated that penetration and time spent with FAST continue to grow. HUB Entertainment Research notes that 57% of U.S. HHs³ use FAST. TVision Insights reports that 12% of time spent with CTV in the U.S. is with FAST apps⁴. And at Samsung, where our FAST app, TV Plus, is a top 5 app by users and time spent, we recently announced that FAST consumption has grown by nearly 60% in the past year⁵.

To answer the important questions advertisers have about FAST, we will look at two key dimensions of growth – the number of major companies offering FAST services, and the number of available channels on these platforms.

Number of Major U.S. Fast Services, 2019-2023



FAST Services

The number of major FAST services continues to grow in 2023, with ABC, Google, and TCL launching new services to sit alongside 16 other services from entertainment and technology companies. Since 2019, 12 new major services have launched, tripling the FAST market, a testament to the promise that FAST offers.

¹Peacock, Pluto TV and Roku Channel all offer variations where some channels can have the content start from the beginning if it is accessed at any point in time in the linear schedule, but the majority of channels do not offer that capability

²<https://variety.com/vip/solving-the-unsolved-mystery-of-u-s-avoid-commercial-time-1234949567/>

³<https://www.mediapost.com/publications/article/385323/turnaround-consumers-reduce-video-services-stack.html>

⁴<https://chart-na1.emarketer.com/263002/share-of-us-time-spent-with-connected-tv-ctv-by-app-type-april-2023-of-total>

⁵<https://news.samsung.com/us/samsung-tv-plus-reveals-massive-viewership-growth-new-music-kids-experiences/>

Source: FASTMaster/CRG Global Analysis for Samsung Ads

What Content is on FAST?

The number of FAST channels available across the FAST services has seen significant growth every year as more content companies and brands enter the space. As of November 2023, there are over 1,900 individual FAST channels in the U.S. available on one or more major service, an increase of 214% from November 2020.

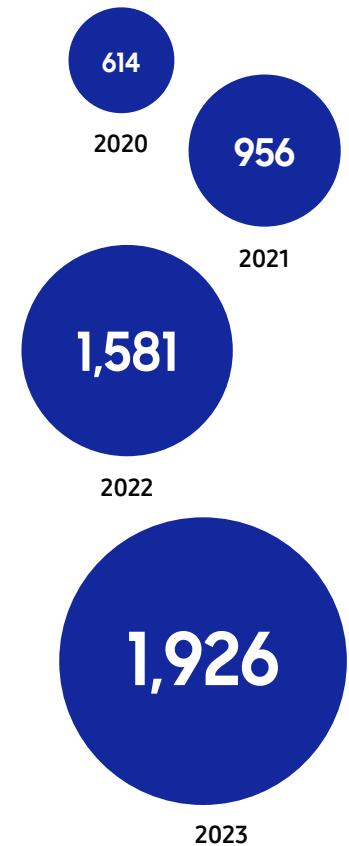
What Programming is On FAST?

Content availability is the primary driver of consumer adoption of any TV service. Yet, in the advertising business there seems to be an assumption that programming on FAST is low-engagement content. As the growth in consumer adoption suggests, this is not the case. FAST apps on the Samsung platform have an average engagement index score of 132 compared to all apps and linear TV channels. While library content is popular on FASTs, the same is true for what airs on linear TV networks and makes up a large swathe of the content on SVOD services. The success of *Suits* on Netflix occupied much of the trade press' focus on SVOD during 2023. Across linear networks and streaming services, shows like *Law & Order*, *Friends*, *The Big Bang Theory*, and others are attracting audiences.

FAST programming is a myriad of content types and genres including entertainment, news, music, sports and live broadcasts. This is likely to grow in the future. The expansion of news, particularly local news, has been an inflection point for FAST. News continues to draw viewers to Pay-TV and its availability on FAST makes cutting the cord easier for Pay-TV stalwarts. Live, local news also opens the door for further growth in live content on FAST and has important implications for sporting events moving to FAST.

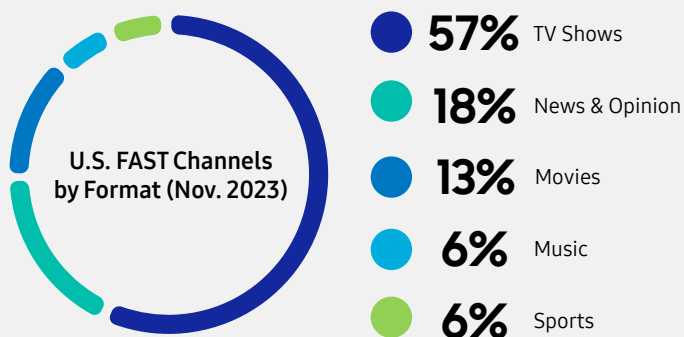
FAST content is available across multiple languages. While the majority of FAST Channels broadcast in English, 14.5% of channels are Spanish-language and the remaining 6.5% are in other languages.

Total Available FAST Channels on Major U.S. Services by Year



FAST Formats

Several lenses help detail the content that is available on FAST. The first of these is format.



Five main formats within FAST

Current and classic TV shows, including scripted and reality programs, account for more than half of all FAST channels available across major FAST services in the U.S., a fact that makes sense considering the volume of available TV programming. The next largest format is News & Opinion, which makes up around one in five channels, followed by Movies. Music and Sports each account for just over 1 in 20 FAST channels.

FAST Genres

The second way to assess what's available on FAST is by genre within each format. A genre analysis demonstrates the rich variety of content that's available to viewers.

TV Shows

When breaking down the available genres within the TV Series format, it’s apparent how many content companies have turned to FAST, not just in scale (with 1,087 total channels) but the breadth of genre. The most popular genres to have FAST channels are reality (120), drama (115), documentaries (97), kids (83), channels featuring mixed genres (78) and comedy (73).

Number of TV Show FAST Channels by Genre									
Reality	Drama	Documentary	Kids	Mixed Genre	Comedy	True Crime	Classics	Food	
120	115	97	83	78	73	59	51	46	
Game Shows	Lifestyle	Religious	Home Improvement	Travel	Pop Culture	Courtroom	Family	Black Culture	Western
32	27	24	24	22	20	19	17	16	16
Gaming & Esports	Automotive	Relaxation	Paranormal	Animals	Sci-Fi	Anime	Other Unscripted	Other Scripted	
15	15	14	13	13	13	12	43	12	

Movies

When it comes to movie channels available on FAST, the most popular channel type is one that features multiple genres (such as The Movie Hub or MovieSphere by Lionsgate). Then it’s a four-way split for movie channels based on the following themes: action, classic movies, drama, and horror. Movies are a format that reflects cultural events like Valentine’s Day, Halloween and the Holidays, with holiday-themed movie channels illustrating this growth from 3 channels in September 2023 to 14 in November. Interestingly, while kids’ content on FAST has been embraced by the TV show side, for movies there are just two dedicated channels.

Number of Movie FAST Channels by Genre				
Mixed Genre	Action	Horror	Classics	Drama
65	34	32	30	30
Holidays	Family	Western	Romance	Sci-Fi
14	10	10	9	9
Black Culture	Comedy	Bollywood	Kids	LGBTQ+
6	6	4	2	2

News

News has grown into one of FAST's hottest areas. It has seen an explosion in the number of channels available with 333 available as of November, 2023. News channels have evolved from being loops of evergreen content and are now either high quality national news channels--indistinguishable from broadcast and cable news outlets and produced by newsrooms from the likes of ABC News, CNN, and Fox News—or feeds from local news channels, which now account for 69% of all FAST news channels.

A key driver for both national and local news is how many of these stations feature a live component for part of the day. Many local stations simulcast live with the TV broadcast, with some creating additional detailed reporting as a FAST exclusive. As news coverage of the 2024 election ramps up, we expect to see viewers turn to both local and national FAST channels resulting in increased news consumption on FAST.

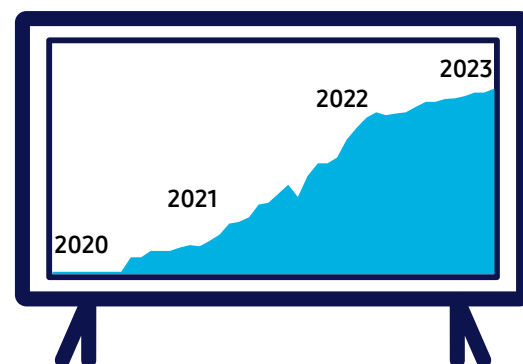
Number of FAST News Channels by Genre (Nov. 2023)



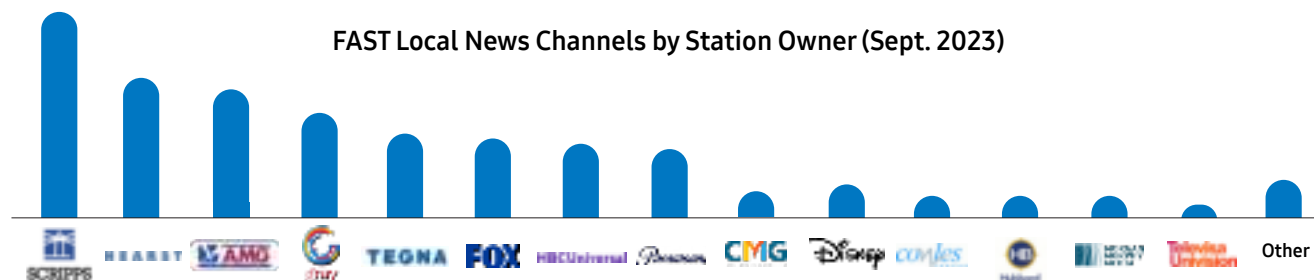
Focus on Local News

The number of local news channels embracing FAST across major services has exploded in recent years as channels showed a degree of savviness in pivoting to embrace audiences wherever they are watching. This also helps to ensure that local stations maintain their relevancy in the digital era and maximize their reach. Local news on FAST has gone from 3 local stations available on tracked services in September 2020 to over 230 in November 2023. With Spanish-markets in the U.S. also entering the space, local news on FAST shows no sign of slowing any time soon.

Total Number of U.S. Local News Fast Channels



FAST Local News Channels by Station Owner (Sept. 2023)



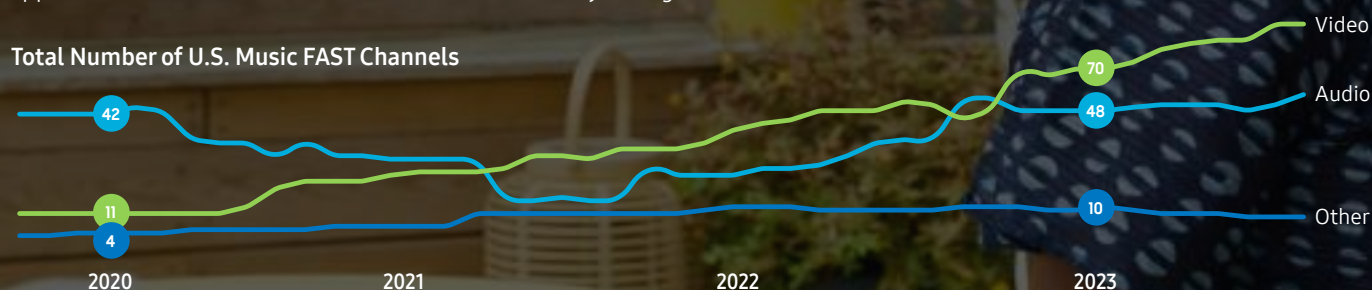
Notably, the likes of Sinclair and Nexstar, local TV giants, don't feature as major players in FAST, suggesting that there's still growth to come in FAST local news.

Music

Music FAST channels are emerging as a key part of every FAST service's channel line-up. The number of music channels has increased from 57 in February 2020 to 128 in November 2023. Channels based on music videos have been a key factor in that growth, with Vevo and MTV being the only companies to consistently have had channels throughout the tracked period.

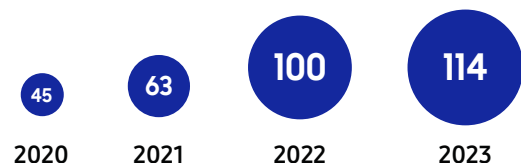
Music channels can be themed by decade or by genre. The available genre channels include Vevo Pop, Yo! MTV, Xite Only Love, Stingray Today's K-Pop and iHeart Hit Nation. Music channels are also a strong source of extended viewership resulting in audiences being served multiple ad pods. At their 2023 NewFronts, Vevo noted that average time spent viewing their channels extends beyond 30 minutes. Vevo is also one of the first companies to create original longform content for FAST with Extended Play, a series produced in collaboration with featured artists that takes viewers through the creation of their music. The continued increase in FAST music channels, coupled with forays into FAST originals, demonstrates the appetite audiences have for the format and will be a key strength for FAST in the future.

Total Number of U.S. Music FAST Channels



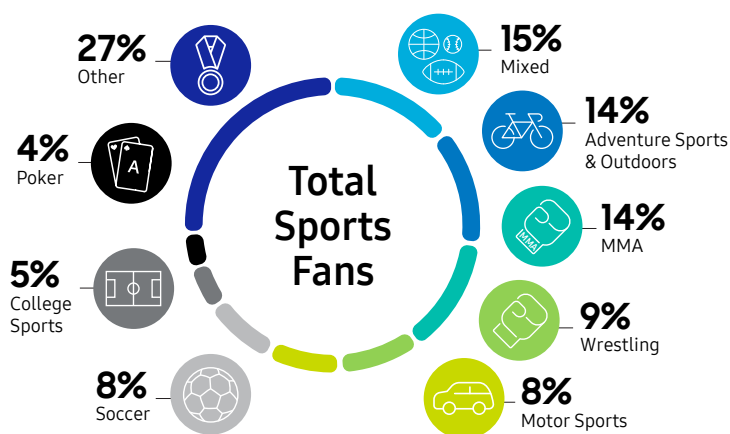
Sports

Total Number of Sports FAST Channels



Sports is another genre that has seen growth in the number of FAST channels available, growing from 45 in November 2020 to 114 in November 2023 (a growth rate of 153%). A key trend in Sports has been leagues like the NFL, MLB, PGA Tour, NHL and FIFA launching their own FAST channels. Although these channels lack rights to live events, they act as fandom extenders, enabling fans to engage deeply with the sports they love.

Number of Sports FAST Channels by Genre



Live sports do exist on FAST. These live events tend to be for niche sports that don't draw the large investments that major sports rights cost broadcast partners (estimated by Variety VIP+ to cost a total of \$29.3 billion by 2026⁶). The live sports line-up features multiple channels for sports like MMA, adventure sports, and professional wrestling. But live sports from bigger leagues are coming to FAST. CBS Sports Golazzo Network airs live a number of different soccer competitions or leagues, sometimes a simulcast of an event with a different camera angle, and other times exclusive rights. Ion, E.W. Scripps' flagship channel, simulcasts all of its content on FAST including WNBA games and starting in 2024, the National Women's Soccer League regular season. This trend will continue as Pay-TV subscriptions continue to decline and rights holders with FAST networks look to maximize audience reach to provide the greatest appeal to advertisers.

FAST Livestreams

A growing trend in FAST is livestreams of TV networks. As with Sports, live simulcasts of linear or digital broadcasts are an important way for networks and distributors to reach the largest audience. Cheddar News and Bloomberg both have FAST livestreams. But the most prominent example is the Ion network. Ion is a nationally distributed over-the-air broadcast network and the first to embrace digital distribution via FAST, where viewers see the same feed on FAST as on linear TV. Ion is owned by E.W. Scripps, which also leads in local news channels on FAST—also typically livestreams—and has a national news FAST network in Scripps News as well as FAST extensions of their diginets.

This is an important development in FAST, as it spotlights the embrace of the format by a national broadcaster. More importantly, Ion tends to be one of the highest performing FAST channels across the services carrying it, demonstrating the potential for other broadcast networks to add FAST carriage at some point in the future. While these channels are accessible for a fee as part of a cable package, they are also free to access via an antenna. Adding another means of free distribution via FAST would be a logical extension. In the case of Ion, it means that the network is able to both maximize their reach and profitability. They won't be the last.

Brands on FAST

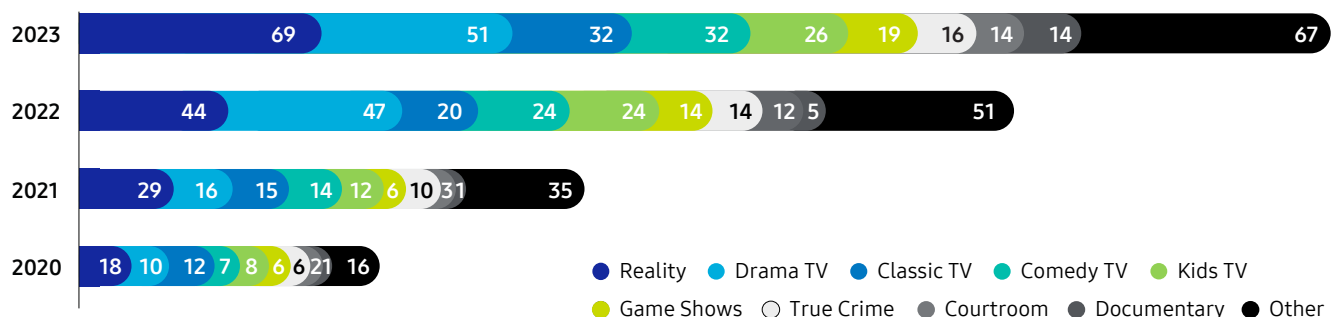
Another way to view the content on FAST is by the increase in content from big media brands, and more recently, celebrities. With the entrance of Warner Bros. Discovery to FAST in 2023, and Disney offering FAST channels within its ABC app, every major TV entertainment company now offers a suite of FAST channels, alongside major studios like Sony Pictures and Lionsgate.

Celebrities are also getting in on the action and are the next big trend to keep an eye on. Kevin Hart has LOL! Channel, Ryan Reynolds has Maximum Effort Channel, and YouTube celebrity Mr. Beast is the latest social media star to bring content to the FAST screen.

Single-IP Channels

A concept that defines FAST is what's known as a single-IP channel—a channel that's based on a single TV show or franchise. These channels offer bingeable experiences to viewers, both casual and hard-core fans. Single-IP channels are popular with viewers and have increased considerably in recent years from 86 in 2020 to 340 in 2023. Single-IP channels include Unsolved Mysteries and Forensic Files, Hell's Kitchen, The Walking Dead, and Conan O'Brien TV.

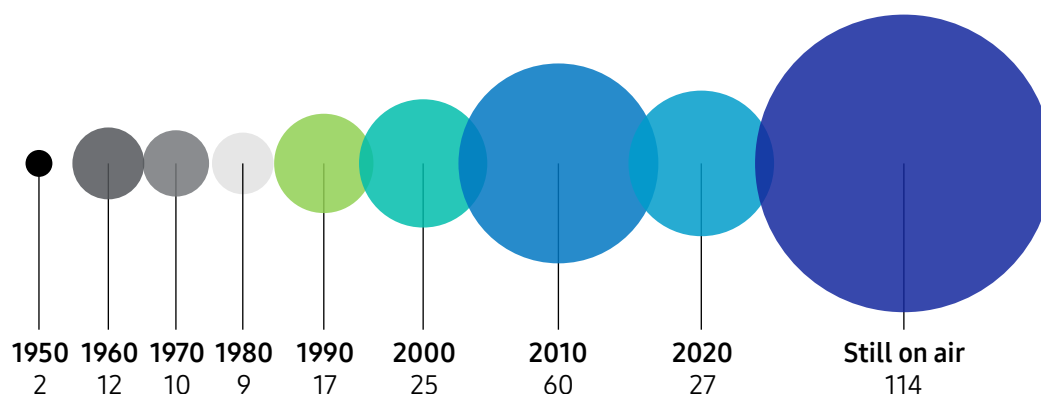
Number of Single-IP FAST Channels by Genre



More Than Reruns

A common misconception about FAST is that the majority of content is mostly reruns of old content. Analysis conducted of single-IP channels in the U.S. illustrates how much of a misconception this is. As of September 2023, of the 340 single-IP channels, 114 (just over 33%) were based on shows or franchises that were **still making new content**. As curious consumers sample FAST and scroll through the available channels, seeing channels based on shows like Survivor, Law & Order or Hell's Kitchen can give FAST an instant credibility boost and add to the feeling that it is just the same as what viewers think of as "TV".

Number of Single-IP FAST Channels by Decade of Last New Episode



FAST Exclusives & Originals

In addition to syndicated content that aired elsewhere before appearing on FAST, services are also offering content exclusive to FAST and original programming. National news channels like NBC News Now, ABC News Live and CBS News all produce original shows for FAST, as does Fox Weather, with a number of local stations creating FAST-only content. Shows distributed on FAST from Tastemade (Struggle Meals) and Freevee (Judy Justice) have won daytime Emmys, beating out competition from broadcast and cable networks.

Channels from celebrities have created originals, like LOL! Network's Cold As Balls and Maximum Effort Channel's Bedtime Stories with Ryan. This report already referenced Vevo Pop's original series Extended Play; Women's Sports Network produces the FAST original game show Game On; and Roku Channel is the exclusive home for live editions of The Rich Eisen Show⁷ as well as airing originals from celebrities like Martha Stewart⁸ and Emeril Lagasse⁹. In addition, channels like FailArmy, Revolt Mixtape, Fox Soul, KIN, Tastemade and FilmRise's channels such as FilmRise Black TV all create original content on FAST¹⁰.

Other channels are using FAST as part of a modern distribution strategy. MotorTrend released episodes of Super Turbo Story Time on MotorTrend FAST TV shortly after airing on their cable channel. ElectricNow, the FAST channel for Electric Entertainment, aired the first two episodes of the new Syfy Channel show The Ark before the linear debut and helped to drive the strong viewership that the series saw in its cable premiere.

Source: FASTMaster/CRG Global Analysis for Samsung Ads

⁷<https://variety.com/2022/tv/news/rich-eisen-show-ropup-streaming-sports-1235342045/amp/>

⁸<https://www.marthastewart.com/8327731/martha-stewart-new-shows-roku-channel>

⁹<https://newsroom.roku.com/news/2023/02/the-roku-channel-serves-up-season-2-orders-for-/rolb4-ze-1675869042>

¹⁰<https://variety.com/vip/yes-there-are-originals-on-fast-tastemade-freevee-vevo-nbc-cbs-1235703925/>

What Does the Future Hold for FAST?

When considering the future of the format it's important to look ahead to what FAST will see in 2025 and the longer-term trends that will occur by 2030.

● FAST by 2025

Media's Increased Involvement

A key evolution that will continue into 2025 will be the embrace of big media brands running FAST channels. It's likely we will see more announcements like NBCUniversal's in the summer of 2023, that they will be releasing 50 new FAST channels, as media companies mine their content libraries to create both genre-curated channels like Universal Crime and many more single-IP channels like Lassie, E! Keeping Up, or Conan O'Brien TV. Each FAST channel expands a media brand's reach and advertising inventory—a strong incentive.

In addition, we will see more channels launched by celebrities, featuring content that the celebrity themselves would watch. (There is strong potential within this area for programming blocks from content providers like Vevo for elements like "Mike's favorite songs from the 80s.").

Non-Traditional Media in FAST

The embrace of social media influencers in FAST will also continue. The likes of channels by creators and brands like Preston & Brianna, Mythical, Mr. Beast and Unspeakable are just the beginning as Gen Z and Alpha discover the format.

This influx of recognizable content will have a positive effect on smaller independent channels. Many of today's independent channels will not be around in 2025. Some will merge to create a mega-version of a particular genre—think an MMA channel based on four or five existing ones—and others will find new life as content licensors to larger channels who require fresh content in their schedules.

FAST and TV Will Become the Same to Consumers

The distinction between broadcast and cable TV networks and FAST channels will continue to blur. More MVPDs and virtual MVPDs will include FAST channels into their lineups as they become indistinguishable from traditional TV channels. The continued invasion of FAST by TV brands will also add to this blurring from a consumer perspective—if TV channels are on FAST, surely then FAST must be TV? We may start to see the traditional idea of a network encompass FAST channels. We should also be on the lookout for a new term arising from consumers themselves.

The Battle for Control

The entry point for watching FAST will become increasingly important. Companies who control distribution—TV sets, video game consoles, set-top boxes and other connected devices—and own a FAST service powering it—will become the defacto entry point for FAST channels.

● FAST by 2030

FAST in 2030 will be radically different from that in 2025, much as 2025's landscape will be alien to 2020's. Key to this will be AI, the convergence of TV with FAST and freemium upsells.

Within the next few years, many FAST services will offer 1,000 channels or more. AI will make that possible, ensuring that users only see the most relevant 200-300 in a grid, offering unparalleled choice and options to the consumer.

Cable networks will continue to run brand extensions for older content, but in a bid to reach the maximum number of viewers, all broadcast networks will follow Ion's trendsetting move to FAST and offer livestreams of their own via FAST. Advertisers will embrace this as it will offer them the greatest possible reach to their target audiences.

TV tentpoles—major sporting events and awards shows—will simulcast on FAST. This will begin with events like The Emmys and the Champions League final, but will culminate with The Oscars and the Super Bowl as networks look to deliver the greatest number of viewers.

Finally, the role of FAST as an upsell for premium subscription services will continue. This will take two forms. The first will be an offering with episodes available on a linear basis for free, but available to be watched on-demand for a fee. The second will be an extension of what we already see for services like BritBox, Paramount+, and Peacock. By 2030, all major SVODs, including Apple TV+, Disney+ and Netflix, will have FAST channels featuring relevant library content designed to entice people to subscribe and keep them from churning.

Methodology & About

Methodology: Analysis in this report was conducted across the available services and channels collected in the FASTMaster database. The services included in each year's analysis were as follows:

- 2020: Freevee (as IMDb TV), Peacock, Plex, Pluto TV, Redbox Live TV, Roku Channel, Samsung TV Plus, STIRR, Xumo Play
- 2021: Freevee, LG Channels, Peacock, Plex, Pluto TV, Redbox Live TV, Roku Channel, Samsung TV Plus, Sling Freestream, STIRR, Tubi, Vix (as Prende TV), Vizio WatchFree+, Xumo Play
- 2022: Freevee, LG Channels, Local Now, Peacock, Plex, Pluto TV, Redbox Live TV, Roku Channel, Samsung TV Plus, Sling Freestream, STIRR, Tubi, Vix, Vizio WatchFree+, Xumo Play
- 2023: ABC, Freevee, Google TV, LG Channels, Local Now, Peacock, Plex, Pluto TV, Redbox Live TV, Roku Channel, Samsung TV Plus, Sling Freestream, STIRR, Tubi, Vix, Vizio WatchFree+, Xumo Play

About Samsung Ads

Samsung Ads is Samsung Electronics' advertising ecosystem, spanning hundreds of millions of smart devices across TV, mobile, desktop, and beyond. Our deep understanding of consumers and unmatched position at the intersection of hardware, software and advertising delivers quantifiable results for brands on a massive scale.

About FASTMaster & CRG Global

Formerly the FAST industry's foremost chronicler at Variety Intelligence System, Gavin Bridge is the Vice President of Media Research at CRG Global, a boutique market research firm. He has kept the FASTMaster database since October 2019 and an industry blog—The FASTMaster—since November 2021. Gavin is a thought leader in FAST and frequently consults with brands and attends international conferences in countries such as Australia, South Korea Canada, Spain and France to share his knowledge and ideas. Learn more about CRG Global at www.crgglobalinc.com and read The FASTMaster at fastmaster.substack.com.

