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As social distancing becomes the norm due to the COVID-19 pandemic, thousands of people are suddenly turning to streaming services like Netflix to keep themselves occupied while isolated. According to Verizon, video streaming in the U.S. was up 12% last week over the week before, and all signs suggest that number will continue to climb. With all those people streaming video in high definition, along with increased web conferencing as people work from home, can internet infrastructure handle it, or will our broadband grind to a halt? It's enough of a concern that the European Union recently asked Netflix to force users to stream in standard definition in order to reduce any possible internet strain. European Commissioner Thierry Breton tweeted on Wednesday that he spoke with Netflix CEO Reed Hastings about essentially throttling use. "Teleworking & streaming help a lot but infrastructures might be in strain," Breton tweeted. "To secure internet access for all, let's #SwitchToStandard definition when HD is not necessary." Important phone conversation with @ReedHastings, CEO of @Netflix To beat #COVID19, we #StayAtHome Teleworking & streaming help a lot but infrastructures might be in strain. To secure Internet access for all, let's #SwitchToStandard definition when HD is not necessary. — Thierry Breton (@ThierryBreton) March 18, 2020 Here's the thing: Experts say Americans shouldn't be worried about being forced to switch to standard definition streaming due to slower broadband speeds, otherwise known as network degradation. "We are not seeing network degradation in the United States right now as far as we can tell," said John Busby, managing director at BroadbandNow. "I don't have a huge concern." BroadbandNow, a website that helps people find internet service providers in their area, released a study on Wednesday about internet connections in U.S. cities as more people shift to working remotely amid what is commonly known as the coronavirus outbreak. The study compared this past week's average download speeds in 10 major cities to the average download speeds in the last 10 weeks. The study found that for six of those cities, the average download speeds remained the same this week. Only four cities — Houston, New York City, San Diego, and San Jose, California — had lower download speeds, but Busby said that those dips were not substantial. Chicago, Dallas, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Phoenix, and Seattle all remained at the same download speed. Busby said that BroadbandNow is continuing to monitor download speeds in smaller and midsize cities to compare those numbers as well. Busby did say that BroadbandNow's internet traffic over the last few days was the highest it has ever been in the site's history. "A lot of people are shopping or looking at internet provider options," he said. "People are recognizing now that they need more internet." So as long as download speed trends continue as they have been, our self-quarantine entertainment and work done from home should not suffer from slow internet speeds. Editors' Recommendations By the end of 2008, Blu-ray will be the winning format - the war with HD DVD will be over Rumours abound that Toshiba will pull out of the HD format war in the coming weeks, admitting defeat for HD DVD and handing victory to Sony and Blu-ray.Warner Bros arguably struck the killer blow to HD DVD when it defected to Blu-ray on the eve of this year's CES. Since 5 Jan, the HD DVD camp has fought on (see below). But it's become a hopeless situation, like bailing out the Titanic with a shot glass, or being the 301st bare-chested Spartan to the battle of Thermopylae.With only Paramount and Universal currently providing Hollywood support, the future for HD DVD looks grim. So we reluctantly begin our HD DVD "death watch" - the end can't be far away now...Feb 16: Toshiba almost out of HD DVD, but not quiteWal-mart finally chooses to dump HD DVD; Reuters reports that Toshiba is thinking of throwing in the towel; BDA puts the champagne on ice...Feb 12: HD DVD: will this torment ever end?Netflix and Best Buy choose Blu-ray, dump HD DVD!Feb 7: Amazon US offers HD DVD player, 6 titles for £40Stock clearance today, car boot sale tomorrowFeb 7: Analysts predict Blu-ray to kill off HD DVD in 2008*Gartner expects that, by the end of 2008, Blu-ray will be the winning format in the consumer market, and the war will be over.*Jan 29: HD DVD to make one last plea at US Super BowlBlows \$2.7 million (£1.4 million) on TV adJan 29: Seagate CEO says Blu-ray win 'meaningless'HD DVD loss is irrelevant. Digital downloads are the future.Jan 29: Woolworths goes Blu-ray, won't stock HD DVD*Sales figures clearly show that the market is moving towards one format of high definition DVD.* Woolies saidJan 25: Freebies caused Blu-ray spike in JanSony, Sharp and Panasonic discount Blu-ray players to rub salt in HD DVD's woundsJan 22: 'Save HD DVD' petition gets 11,000 signatures 'Let HD DVD die' petition attracts 4,000Jan 21: HD DVD in freefall, as Blu-ray sales surgeThe top ten selling HD movies in January were all Blu-ray titles.Jan 21: Shops make more room for Blu-rayUS retailers start devoting more shelf-space to Blu-ray, squeezing out HD DVDJan 17: Apple makes web movie rentals mainstreamApple announces iTunes movie rentals, updates Apple TV. Who needs HD discs?Jan 14: Toshiba to slash HD DVD player pricesSlashes player prices in an attempt to spark hardware salesJan 11: Microsoft, Hollywood rush to HD DVD's defenceStill believe HD DVD is the best format for consumers. Group hug?Jan 10: Retailers unwilling to give up on HD DVD yetStores wary of declaring an end to the format warJan 9: Xbox 360 could go Blu-ray, says MicrosoftAfter all, it's just a case of putting a Blu-ray drive in a boxJan 9: Toshiba refuses to let HD DVD dieTake a look at our new Qosmio laptops with HD DVD-R/RW drives. Nice huh?Jan 8: Now Paramount to drop HD DVD?Rats and sinking ship spring to mind, but there's no truth to the rumourJan 7: Toshiba: 'HD DVD is not dead'Warner/Blu-ray bombshell is only a flesh wound...Jan 6: Who needs LG's dual format HD player?Just buy a PlayStation 3 insteadJan 5: Warner ditches HD DVD for Blu-rayGround zero. The beginning of the end for HD DVD... As consumers we've been offered lots of "super" things over the years: Super men, super sizes, Super Bowls. But with Netflix's Super HD, that promise was reserved for the elite—or those who get their Internet service via select ISPs, at any rate. On Thursday, Netflix opened the bit-filled floodgates to one and all, rolling out its highest-quality HD video streaming to anyone with the bandwidth to handle it. As Netflix describes it, Super HD applies less compression to its 1080p video streams, giving you a higher bitrate and better image quality. When Super HD first launched in January, it was limited to ISPs that adopted Netflix Open Connect, the company's video delivery network. The initiative drew criticism from some ISPs and net neutrality advocates for its seemingly preferential treatment of Netflix content. At the same time, Netflix wrote that "we continue to encourage ISPs to adopt Netflix Open Connect" and that subscribers to those ISPs will "get the best experience" in its blog post on Thursday. Super HD requires bandwidth between 5 mbps and 7 mbps. Thursday's change also impacts Netflix's small catalog of 3D content, although that will run you between 6 mbps and 12 mbps on bandwidth, and is much more limited in its device support right now. You'd think that, with a fast enough Internet connection, watching Netflix in HD - or even 4K Ultra HD - would be a foregone conclusion, but did you know there's a whole host of devices that can't get Netflix in HD? Netflix doesn't dole out HD to just anyone. Vendors and service providers need the golden pass first before they can display any Netflix content at the higher resolutions. In other words, that device you have may not be serving up the HD goods, and it would seem it's Android users who are getting the rawest deal. Here's why: The cool club - who qualifies Netflix has a handy list of HD-ready devices, and if you look closely, you'll notice there's only seven approved streaming media players: Apple TV, Roku, Chromecast, Nexus Player, Amazon Fire TV, Nvidia Shield, and LG's Smart TV Upgrader. That's it. Anything else considered a "streaming box" doesn't make the cut. The list of Android phones that can pull down HD in Netflix is even more scant. The reason? Netflix has to test every device seeking access. Once approved, those devices can access as high a resolution as the hardware can handle. Under those criteria, it should come as no surprise that the list of supported products is made up of recognizable brands. Even though Sony isn't noted under the Smart TV section, its TVs have been able to stream Netflix in HD for some time now. In fact, Android TV, which is basically the same as a Nexus Player, is now baked in to most of the company's latest Bravia TVs. Not every single brand is noted, though. Vizio TVs have offered Netflix for some time now, and are more than capable of streaming Netflix in HD. Insignia, Hisense, Haier and TCL all have TVs with baked-in Roku, which gives them HD Netflix by extension. Netflix has little to say on the matter. Streaming in 4K Ultra HD requires another round of approval, and for consumers, the main focus isn't just compatibility, but also the speed of the home network to handle the higher bandwidth required. Game consoles and Blu-ray players are also widely supported, but in the latter case, it's generally the top brands that get full access. Out in the cold Compatible smartphones and tablets are batched together by iOS, Android and Windows Phone, but dig a little deeper and you'll find out HD support isn't as extensive as you might expect. According to Netflix's Android Tablet Help Center page, only seven tablets qualify: the Dell Venue 8 7840 (Requires Android 5.0+), Google Nexus 7 2013, Nvidia Shield Portable, Nvidia Shield Tablet, Nvidia Tegra Note 7, Samsung Galaxy Tab S 8.4, and Samsung Galaxy Tab S 10.5. Netflix has little to say on the matter. The list of Android phones that can pull down HD in Netflix is even more scant, given how many Android smartphones there are; most are relegated to 480p standard-definition. The exclusive list includes Google Nexus 6, LG G3, Motorola DROID Turbo, Motorola Moto X, 2014 Samsung Galaxy Note 4, Samsung Galaxy Note 5, Samsung Galaxy S6, Samsung Galaxy S6 Edge, and Samsung Galaxy S6 Edge+. For iOS, things are better, albeit with some caveats. Use AirPlay to beam Netflix from an iPhone 6 or 6s to an Apple TV and you get 720p (unless it's a 6 Plus or 6s Plus). Do it directly from the native Netflix app on the Apple TV and you get 1080p. Same with a Chromecast: Cast Netflix from a device that doesn't have HD support and it will stay at a lower resolution. Access the same content using the native app on a Nexus Player, and you get 1080p. This HD policy also adversely affects the increasingly popular Android-based boxes that usually run on heavily skinned tablet OS versions. These Android boxes have grown in popularity as streaming alternatives, particularly because they usually run Kodi (formerly XBMC), thereby opening the door to sourcing an endless array of content. These boxes don't generally run the latest version of Android, but do offer full access to Google Play, and that includes the Netflix app, which works perfectly fine, except it defaults to standard-definition. This is true across the board on any third-party Android set-top box (save the Fire TV), so if you think you're watching HD Netflix on that no-name box, think again. Even if the box supports 4K resolution, it will always default to 480p on the Netflix app. Netflix APK (Android Package Kit) files users can sideload onto unsupported Android devices are easy enough to find floating around on the web, and BlackBerry users have been sideloading Netflix for years, but finding a Netflix APK that brings the benefits of HD to Netflix on a device without official support is a different thing altogether. There doesn't appear to be one that can unlock the higher-quality streams. We looked high and low for it, and got nothing. What Netflix says Netflix has little to say on the matter. When Digital Trends contacted the company requested further information on how it certifies HD compatibility, Marlee Tart, the company's manager of corporate communications, responded via email with this: "Netflix is available on thousands of devices, many of which support HD streaming. Members with the standard plan (\$8.99) or higher and compatible devices will be able to stream Netflix in high-definition." She made no further comment and didn't elaborate. Subscribing to a standard plan or higher does guarantee HD access, but only on "compatible devices," which we've already noted. The company has been mull on how it may expand on those respective lists to include more of the mobile devices and third-party streaming boxes viewers are using. With HD-capable screens now ubiquitous, the ability to display Netflix's content in 720p or 1080p already passes any technical hurdles. It's unclear if the big manufacturers who are already approved have the pull to get Netflix to block the small guys from joining the HD club. What is apparent, at least for set top boxes, is that building a native Netflix app is a prerequisite to at least be considered for certification. Either way, while Netflix is easy to find on so many different devices, the HD experience belongs to an exclusive group - at least for now. Have you been left out without realizing it? Editors' Recommendations

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