

CNET > [Reviews](#) > [Digital Video Recorders \(DVRs\)](#) > [Toshiba digital video recorders \(dvrs\)](#) > [Dish Hopper with Sling](#)

# Dish Hopper with Sling: HD DVR almost has it all

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By David Camoy

Executive Editor David Camoy has been a leading member of CNET's Reviews team since 2000. He covers the gamut of gadgets and is a notable e-reader and e-publishing expert. He's also the author of the novels *Knife Music* and *The Big Exit*. Both titles are available as Kindle, iBooks, and Nook e-books.

LAS VEGAS--How do you top the Hopper, Dish's kangaroo-themed HD DVR system?

Well, according to Dish CEO Joe Clayton, it's pretty simple: you upgrade it with a faster 1,305MHz Broadcom processor add Wi-Fi, integrate Slingbox, and serve up a new feature called Hopper Transfers that allows you to transfer recorded programming to your iPad for viewing on the go without an Internet connection.

It's pretty cutting-edge stuff and helps Dish make a strong case that its HD DVR is the most advanced out there.

Like its previous DVR models, the new Hopper with Sling is free for new subscribers, but carries a \$449 list price for others (\$100 more than the original). That said, satellite and cable providers like Dish often offer existing customers deals on new hardware, and Clayton told CNET that existing customers will be offered "an upgrade path" to the new Hopper, though he wasn't clear on what that pricing would be.

## Next-generation Hopper less than a year later

Last year at CES, Dish introduced the Hopper and its companion box, the Joey, which allows you to add up to three additional rooms to the Hopper "whole-home" system. However, it took several months for Dish to get the Hopper into consumers' homes and to work the bugs out.

Now, only about eight months after launch, the company has already upgraded the product in a few keys ways.



The Dish Hopper with Sling will ship within the next few weeks. It will be free for new Dish subscribers.

(Credit: Dish)

With the original Hopper, you had to buy an optional external Slingbox (it connected via USB) if you wanted to use the place-shifting feature with the Hopper. Now Slingbox, which is owned by Echostar, Dish's parent company, is built right into the unit. You are essentially getting a [Slingbox 500](#), which retails for \$299.

Also, instead of having to pay for a separate app to Sling content to mobile devices such as

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the iPhone, iPad, and Android smartphones and tablets, users can download the company's free Dish Anywhere app to their devices to stream content.

It's also worth noting that you can log onto [dishanywhere.com](http://dishanywhere.com) to stream content from your Hopper with Sling system to any computer so long as you have an Internet connection. You can also manage your recordings remotely. Obviously, the quality of the video stream will depend on the speed of your Internet connection -- both upstream and downstream.

### Hopper Transfers

The most intriguing new feature is Hopper Transfers, which allows you to move television recordings from your Hopper with Sling to an iPad for viewing when you're offline. The way it works is when you go to record a program, you can set your DVR to encode that recording on the fly (in real time) into a file that you can later transfer wirelessly to your iPad (Note: at launch Dish says that Hopper Transfers will only work with iPads. Presumably an Android solution is in the works, but Dish wouldn't offer a time frame for its release).



With Hopper Transfers, you can transfer recorded shows and movies to your iPad wirelessly.

(Credit: Dish)

On the surface, this sounds great, but there are a few caveats, the biggest of which is the file size of the recording. Yes, the native file gets compressed down, but you're still left with about a 2GB file for an hour recording. For those who have an iPad with limited memory, a few shows could quickly eat up any remaining storage space.

Alas, at launch, you won't have a choice of video quality settings; there's currently only one high-quality mode (the video does look quite good on the iPad, even if it doesn't quite reach HD resolution).

Hopper Transfers is obviously an appealing feature for frequent travelers as well as parents who are looking for a way to keep their kids entertained in the car.



When you record a show, you can set it to automatically 'Prepare for Mobile' as it records (click image to enlarge).

(Credit: David Carnoy/CNET)

If you're wondering if there are any restrictions for transfers, the answer is yes. We're still verifying all the details on those restrictions, but Dish reps mentioned that you'd only be able to transfer a file five times, which would limit the number of devices you could transfer it to. That said, you could re-record a show and start over. (When we get further information on the restrictions, we'll update this post).

#### **Dish Explorer app for the iPad**

The final new feature Dish is touting is its free Dish Explorer app for the iPad, which the company refers to as a "second-screen" app that you tap into to figure out what to watch without surfing through the hundreds of channels in the guide. The app has a social element and surfaces popular shows trending on Twitter and Facebook. You can also use the app -- and your iPad -- as a remote to change channels on your TV once you find a show you want to watch.

Currently, like the Hopper Transfers feature, Dish Explorer is only available for the iPad (it's scheduled to be available in the app store on January 7). No word on when a version for Android devices will be available.

#### **Better Hopper, but some angry customers?**

Over the last year, Dish has been aggressive about introducing new features and products. The new Hopper with Sling retains all the features of the original Hopper, including PrimeTime Anytime which records all shows during prime-time hours to your DVR.

Both the original Hopper and new one also offer Bluetooth connectivity so you can stream audio to any Bluetooth-enabled headphones, which is nice for late-night viewing. Dish recently enabled this feature on the original Hopper and it works out of the box with the new one.

All those features -- and some others I haven't mentioned -- make for an impressive, very full-featured DVR system that borders on having almost everything you could possibly want (of course, all the features have to work smoothly, but that's another story). However, upgrading the Hopper so soon may upset some users who bought the system last year.

Dish's CEO Clayton didn't seem too concerned, saying they'd find a way to keep existing customers happy.

This time, at least, the wait for the new system won't be long. Dish expects to release the Hopper with Sling in the next month.