

Why does every device you buy require a monthly fee?

These days, buying a new piece of tech is like signing up for a gym membership you never cancel.

I don't know exactly when this happened, but at some point, buying a piece of tech wasn't the end of the story anymore. It used to be that you just handed over your money and took it home, and that was it. Maybe a few years later you needed to buy a replacement battery or cable, but the product was still yours, intact and complete.

Buying a new piece of tech these days is like signing up for a gym membership you never cancel. The initial price is just the kicker, and before you can peel the plastic off the screen, you're asking for your credit card information. Subscriptions are becoming more and more common, and are now one of those tech upgrades that makes things worse.

List price isn't everything anymore

The bill is not the end



You bought a TV a few years ago and thought you were paying for instant entertainment. That was the whole point, right? But that's not the case anymore. When you open the box, the TV is just a big, glowing rectangle.

Unless you like watching local broadcasts or taking advantage of its USB port by plugging in a flash drive loaded with some downloaded files, the real fun starts when you add a monthly subscription.

First came cable TV. Then came Netflix . And then Netflix wasn't enough, so we added Amazon Prime, Hulu, and dozens of other streaming services that might be worth paying for. The TV itself is a one-time purchase, but maintaining its usefulness requires consistent monthly payments.

Smart devices come with silly restrictions if not registered





The biggest offenders here are smart devices. Doorbells, thermostats, and even security cameras often work fine out of the box, but subscriptions kick in as soon as you want more than the bare minimum. Take video doorbells, for example. Most let you watch live video or get motion alerts, but if you actually want to save the recordings, you have to pay a monthly cloud storage fee. So you might own the hardware, but you're missing out on basic features like checking in on what happened the night before.

Printers and other home appliances are similar.

Ink isn't the only thing printers cost these days.

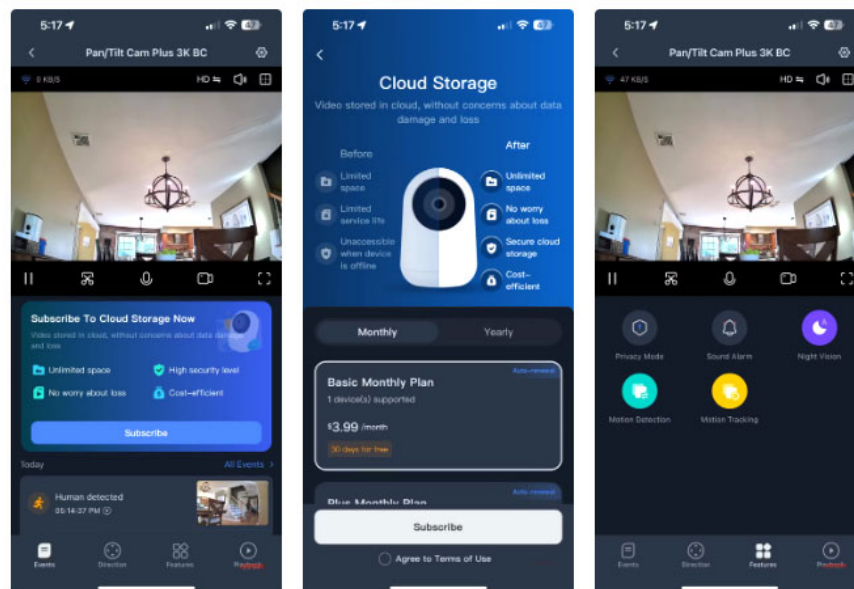


It's not just smart devices that are running on subscriptions. Even regular household appliances are getting in on the act. Printers are perhaps the worst example—HP's Instant Ink program essentially turns printing into a membership, and if you cancel, the cartridges can stop working. Coffee makers have experimented with subscription-based home delivery, and brands like Philips Sonicare and Oral-B are now pushing "convenient" monthly toothbrush head refills.

And it doesn't stop there. Major appliance manufacturers are starting to move toward so-called "servitization," moving from simple one-time purchases to ongoing revenue streams.

Software subscriptions are moving to hardware

Pay to unlock



A big reason why every device seems to cost a monthly fee these days is because hardware and software are more tightly intertwined than ever. A phone is no longer just a block of glass and chips. It has an operating

system, an app store, integrated cloud services, and a steady drip of firmware updates built into its value. This setup gives companies countless ways to split features into paid 'unlocks' or subscriptions.

Take BMW, for example. In some markets, it has tried charging around \$18 a month to use the built-in heated seats. The coils and wires are still there, but you have to keep paying to turn them on.

Justification from the manufacturer

Companies call it support



If you push manufacturers about all these escalating monthly fees, they'll probably tell you something like, *"You're not just paying for the device. We also have to maintain online servers, ship updates, handle support and security. Subscriptions are how we keep your device safe and up to date ."*

And to be fair, there's some truth to that. Keeping any smart product secure means patching security holes, deploying software fixes, troubleshooting bugs, running a cloud platform, and paying for hosting. None of that comes cheap. For hardware that relies heavily on software, the ongoing costs of maintaining and developing it can be quite significant.

The more troubling (and increasingly hard to ignore) issue, however, is how many devices today seem to deliberately launch features that are locked, hidden behind paywalls, or unfinished at the outset just to justify charging for them later.

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