

‘Skinny’ TV packages: For most Canadians, hidden fees outweigh ‘pick-and-pay’ freedom

Half say value for TV dollar either “not very good” or “terrible”

April 15, 2016 – As complaints about mandated “skinny basic” television packages [continue to mount](#), a new public opinion poll from the Angus Reid Institute finds relatively few Canadians have actually switched to newly available bundles, while those looking into switching are less than impressed with what they’ve found.

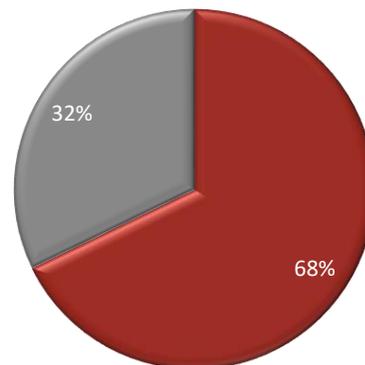
This, despite the fact that there seems to be considerable appetite for change: Half of all Canadians say they’re frustrated with the value they get from their TV service providers, and roughly the same number say the idea behind creating the skinny packages was a good one. That’s almost four times as many as say it was a bad idea.

Key Findings:

- Nearly seven-in-ten Canadians (68%) say “skinny basic” packages aren’t worthwhile because of extra costs TV providers [have been adding](#)
- Most Canadians (78%) are aware of the Canadian Radio Telecommunications Commission (CRTC)’s [decision to mandate the creation of skinny basic packages](#); one-in-six (17%) have looked into switching their service, while only 2 per cent have made the change
- Among those who have investigated skinny TV, two-in-three (66%) say they have a negative impression of the options they found

Which is closer to your own point of view?

- The extra costs mean these packages aren't worthwhile - even though they offer greater choice
- The greater choice means these packages are worthwhile - even if prices don't meet expectations



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from April 5 – 7, 2016, among a representative randomized sample of 1,513 Canadian adults who are members of the [Angus Reid Forum](#). For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 2.5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding. The survey was self-commissioned and paid for by ARI. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

CONTACT:

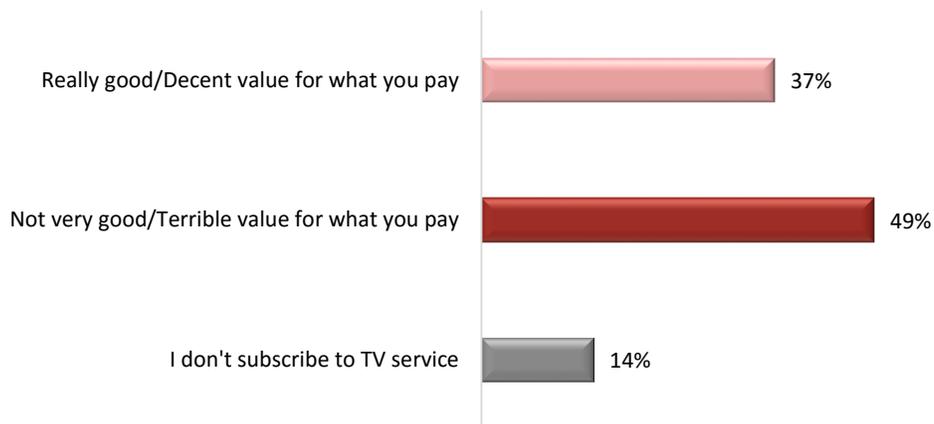
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For many, TV providers offer poor value

In March 2015, the CRTC announced new rules requiring cable and satellite companies to offer stripped-down service packages for \$25 or less and to allow customers to choose individual channels or small bundles to add to their plan. When the rules took effect a year later, [the commission said](#) they would usher in “a new era of choice for Canadian television viewers.”

The changes are part of the CRTC’s “[Let’s Talk TV](#)” initiative, one of the goals of which is to improve choice and affordability for consumers – among them, nearly half of all respondents to this survey, who tell ARI they are frustrated with their current options:

How would you describe the amount you currently pay for television service? Would you say you are getting:



Quebec residents are most likely to say they’re getting their money’s worth when it comes to TV service (53% feel this way), while Atlantic Canadians are most inclined to say they’re getting a bad deal (62%).

Canadians aged 35 or older are also more likely to say they get poor value for their television dollar. This finding is largely attributable to the fact that one-in-four (24%) of those aged 18-34 have “cut the cord” – that is, they don’t subscribe to any TV service at all ([see comprehensive tables for greater detail](#)).

Most say extra costs outweigh extra choices

Since the new CRTC rules took effect, the regulator has been [inundated with complaints](#), many of which centre on the fact that cable companies add extra fees – often for things that are included [in the base price](#) of more expensive packages – that drive the cost of skinny basic packages well over \$25.

Between these fees and the expense of selecting additional “pick-and-pay” channels – where available – getting exactly the TV package one wants can end up costing just as much as buying a traditional bundle.

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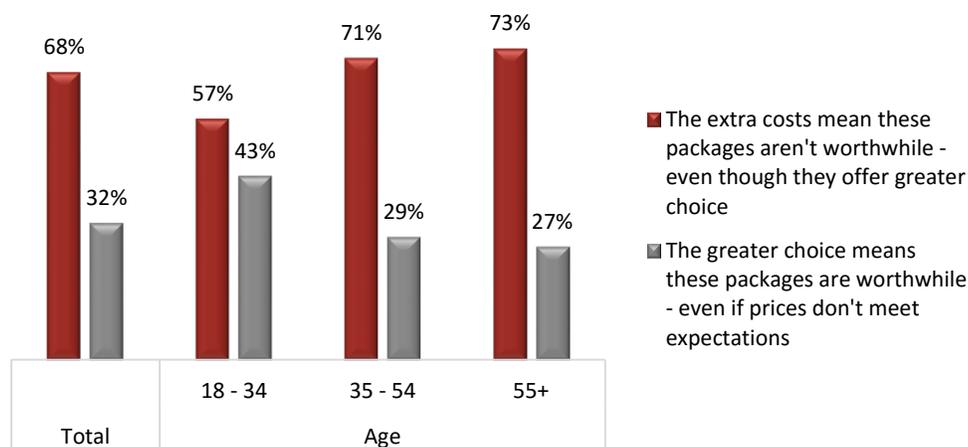
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But does having the freedom to choose a more customized package make the added fees worth switching?

Most Canadians say no. When asked to choose between two opposing statements, a large majority (68%) say extra costs mean packages aren't worthwhile, even if they offer greater choice. About a third (32%) are inclined to agree that greater choice makes the new packages are worthwhile, even if prices don't meet expectations.

Majorities feel this way across all age groups, but younger Canadians (those ages 18 – 34) are more swayed by the choice side of the equation than those over 35:

Which is closer to your own point of view?



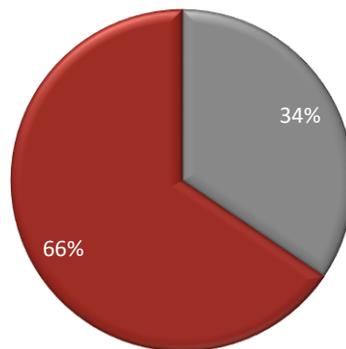
Those most familiar with skinny basic are unimpressed

Most Canadians (78%) are aware of the CRTC's decision to mandate \$25 basic packages and pick-and-pay channel offerings, but comparatively few (17%) say they have investigated these options themselves.

Among those who have – skepticism is common. Indeed, nearly eight-in-ten (79%) of those who have looked into skinny basic – but not switched – say the packages aren't worthwhile because of the extra fees (see summary tables at the end of this report).

Asked specifically whether their consideration of switching to a skinny TV package had left them with a generally positive or negative opinion about the options available, two-in-three say their impression is negative:

**Based on your experience looking into these packages, would you say you have a positive or negative opinion of the options that are available to you?
(asked only of those who have switched or considered switching)**



■ Mostly/Somewhat positive ■ Mostly/Somewhat negative

It should be noted that a small number of Canadians canvassed (roughly 2% of the overall population) have already switched to a skinny basic package. Though too small to be subjected to in-depth statistical analysis, this group does appear to be happy with its collective decision, with the vast majority reporting a positive opinion of the options available.

A good idea, poorly executed?

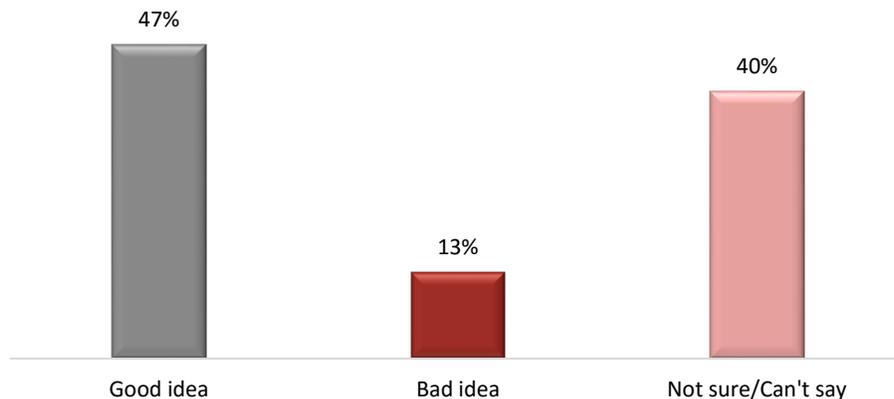
CRTC Chairman Jean-Pierre Blais [has suggested](#) on [multiple occasions](#) that the commission could use the license renewal process for television providers as a means of ensuring compliance with the spirit of the skinny basic rules and other regulations the commission has enacted.

Blais has been less specific about how this would work in practice, however, saying only that the CRTC “will not hesitate to take action” when most broadcaster licenses come up for renewal in 2017.

If the regulator is successful in its effort to bring service providers “in line,” Canadians are likely to be pleased with the results. Asked whether requiring companies to offer stripped-down television packages was a good or a bad idea in the first place, few respondents (13%) say it was a bad one.

For all their displeasure with the reality of skinny TV, nearly half of Canadians (47%) actually think the concept is a good one ([see comprehensive tables for additional detail](#)):

All things considered, would you say the CRTC requiring TV service providers to offer skinny basic packages is a good idea or a bad idea?



*The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research organization established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.*

Summary tables follow. For detailed results by region, age, gender, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).

Which is closer to your own point of view?					
(weighted sample size)	Total (1513)	Awareness of Skinny TV			
		Not aware (330)	Aware, but haven't looked into it (927)	Have looked into switching (218)	Have switched (37*)
The extra costs mean these packages aren't worthwhile - even though they offer greater choice	68%	60%	68%	79%	72%
The greater choice means these packages are worthwhile - even if prices don't meet expectations	32%	40%	32%	21%	28%

*small sample size

Based on your experience looking into these packages, would you say you have a positive or negative opinion of the options that are available to you?			
(weighted sample size)	Total who have either looked into or switched to skinny TV (256)	Awareness of Skinny TV	
		Have looked into switching (218)	Have switched (37*)
Mostly positive	9%	5%	27%
Somewhat positive	26%	23%	44%
Somewhat negative	25%	27%	13%
Mostly negative	41%	45%	16%

*small sample size

Considering the options you've looked into, would you say each of the following types of TV packages is generally a good deal or a bad deal?			
(weighted sample size)	Total who have either looked into or switched to skinny TV (256)	Awareness of Skinny TV	
		Have looked into switching (218)	Have switched (37*)
A package with ONLY the standard "skinny basic" channels			
Very good deal	9%	9%	13%
Moderately good deal	16%	16%	20%
Neither a good deal nor a bad deal	24%	21%	45%
Moderately bad deal	19%	21%	12%
Very bad deal	30%	34%	10%
A "skinny basic" package with a few extra channels you're interested in			
Very good deal	14%	10%	32%
Moderately good deal	24%	25%	21%
Neither a good deal nor a bad deal	18%	18%	21%
Moderately bad deal	20%	21%	17%
Very bad deal	24%	27%	9%

**small sample size*