
bango®
Savvy
Subscriber
Subscription signals 2026
The great
disconnect
and what comes next
DIRECT ACQUISITION
INDIRECT ACQUISITION
CONSUMER SELECTION
AI SELECTION
VOICE SEARCH
CONTENT OVERLOAD!
SUBSCRIBER NEWS
SUBSCRIBERS STILL SHARE PASSWORDS!

© Bango 2026

The great disconnect

Welcome to the great disconnect.

For years, the subscription model ran on a simple contract: sign up, log in, stick around and consume content. Content providers invested billions in content, brands and direct acquisition on the assumption that subscribers would keep paying.

But in 2026, that assumption is changing. Consumers are still subscribing, more than ever, in fact. They are just doing it on entirely different terms. They are tolerating ads to slash costs. They are still sharing passwords without a second thought, despite all the crackdowns. They are loyal to shows first and streaming services second, if they remember which service it's on at all. And when it all gets too complicated? They turn to AI.

The billing relationship between subscriber and service - the foundation the entire industry was built on - is disconnecting.

In this report, we reveal the signals leading to the great disconnect, what is accelerating it and what it means for every subscription provider and reseller fighting to stay relevant and grow in this new era.

Methodology

This report includes data from 4,000 US and UK consumers, exploring their subscription behaviors and attitudes towards the rapidly evolving industry.

Commissioned by Bango and conducted by independent research agency 3Gem, the 'Subscription Signals 2026' research was conducted in January 2026 and published in April 2026.

© Bango 2026

In this report you'll discover:

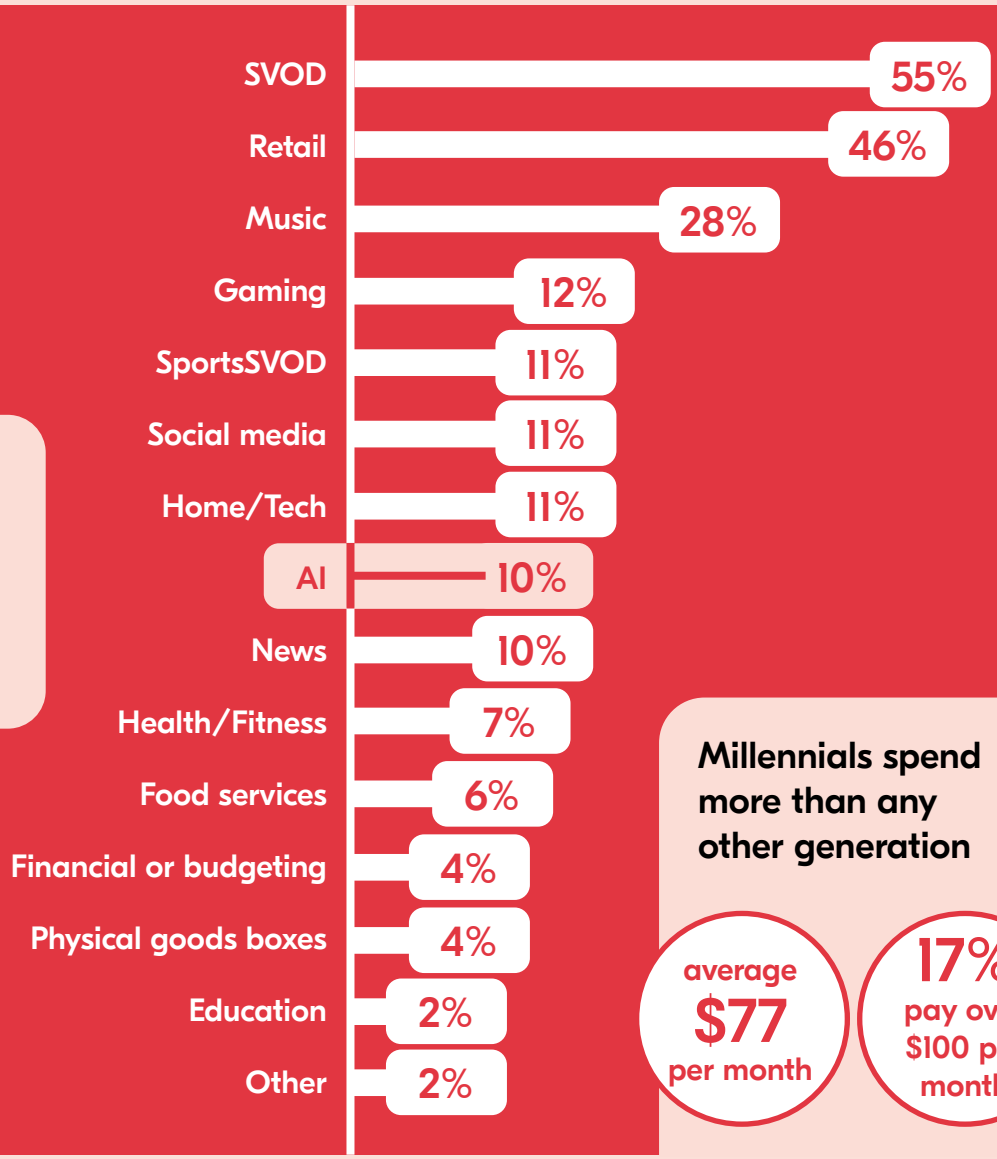
1. How consumers are working their way towards cheaper subscriptions
2. How many consumers are loyal to shows, not services
3. Why consumers are stuck in content overload
4. How choice paralysis is leading consumers to AI
5. Why brands can't rely on direct acquisition alone
6. Where the opportunity lies for content providers and resellers

© Bango 2026

1 Savvy subscribers

Consumers love subscriptions. That hasn't changed. Americans have an average of **5.2 subscriptions** each, resulting in the average subscriber paying **$69 a month** - **that's $830 a year** - on their favorite services.

Top paid subscriptions by category in 2026



Millennials spend more than any other generation

average **$77** per month

17% pay over $100 per month

What has changed is the relationship with price

While the subscription market continues to boom, household budgets have tightened across the board. In 2026, cost has become an undeniable sticking point.

More than one-in-five Americans (23%) report that they are spending more than they can afford on subscriptions, nearly doubling to a massive 41% for Gen Z.

So, how are savvy subscribers managing costs and keeping access to the subs they love?

They're disconnecting from the full price of traditional subscriptions and finding workarounds.

i. Ads, ads, ads!

36% of Americans will tolerate more ads if it saves money on subs

Ad fatigue is officially over. While ads were once the enemy, consumers now see them as a saving grace. In 2024, 78% of subscribers said they strongly objected to paid subscriptions featuring ads. But now in 2026, more than a third of Americans (36%) say they would tolerate twice as many ads in streaming and subscription services if it lowered the cost of those subscriptions.

This marks an enormous change in the behavioral economics of ads.

Younger generations have an even higher tolerance for ads, with nearly half of Millennials (46%) and Gen Z (49%) saying they'd watch double the ads for lower prices.

All of this would allow consumers to enjoy more of the subscriptions they love.

Percentage of users willing to accept more ads for a lower cost (by users of service)

- **52%** of Apple TV users
- **44%** of Netflix users
- **48%** of Disney+ users
- **40%** of Amazon Prime Video users
- **47%** of HBO Max users

ii. Sharing without caring

20% of Americans share their passwords

Despite best efforts from subscription services, cash-strapped consumers are still password sharing. One-in-five Americans say people outside their households "regularly" use their subscriptions (20%), while 19% have no idea who is using their streaming service passwords. Younger generations are naturally leading this trend, with more than a third of Gen Z (38%) sharing passwords and nearly half of students (45%). For content providers spending millions on password-crackdown technology, this is a sobering reality check.

© Bango 2026

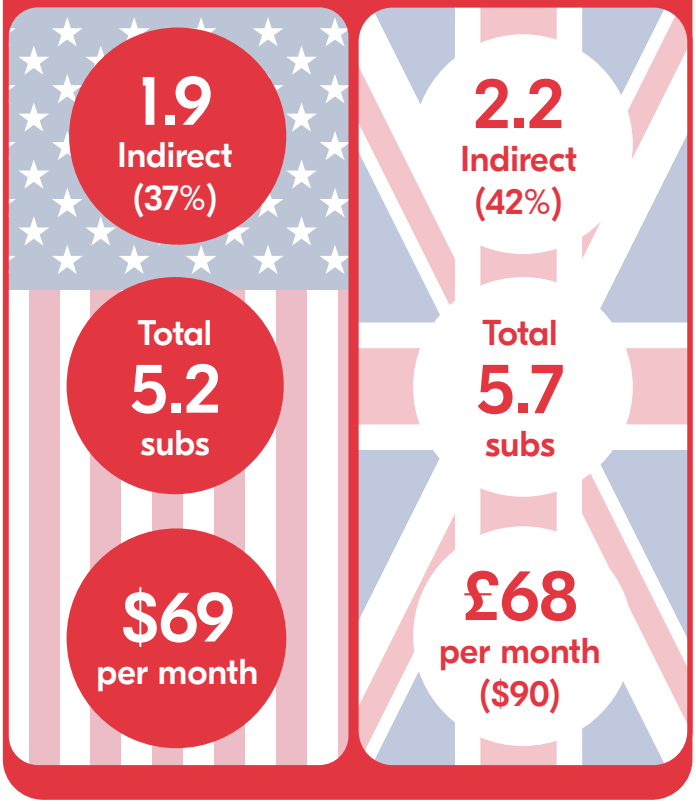
iii. Going indirect

While consumers are changing their usage habits to lower costs, they're also changing their purchasing habits. More services than ever are being accessed indirectly through third parties - whether that's for lower costs, easier subscription management or a combination of both.

Each indirect subscription is another step away from the direct relationship and another signal that the traditional acquisition playbook is losing its grip.

On average, Americans now have 1.9 indirect subscriptions that they've bought via third-party bundles, deals, or as part of pre-existing contracts. That's more than a third (37%) of their total basket of 5.2 subscriptions.

Average subscriptions:



The UK perspective

The UK seemingly loves its subscriptions even more than the US. **The average Brit has 5.7 subscriptions, with 2.2 of those being acquired through indirect channels. Moreover, Brits are paying an average of £68 ($90) per month, or £816 ($1,079) a year, on subscriptions and streaming services.**

But while they may be purchasing more subscriptions on average, there are signs that the UK is feeling the budget squeeze more than their American counterparts. Nearly a third of Brits (30%) spend more than they can afford on subscriptions and 29% say people outside their households regularly use their subscriptions. They're also more ad-hungry than the US, with 42% saying they would double the ads for reduced costs - rising to 50% among British Millennials and 44% for Gen Z.



© Bango 2026

2 Shifting loyalty

Here's a question every SVOD executive should ponder: *is your audience loyal to you or to the content you provide?*

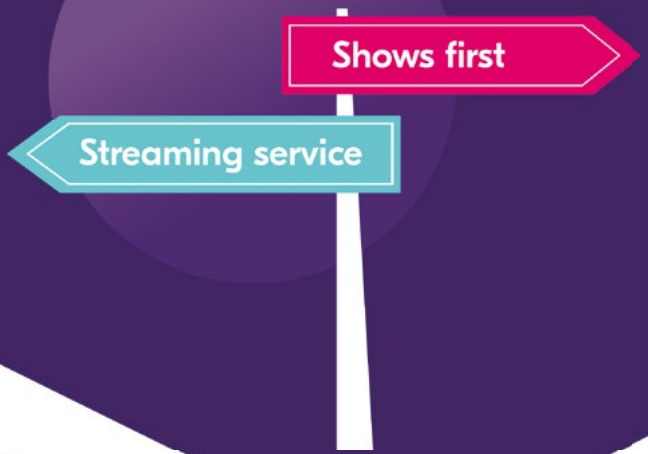
There is a risk that the answer, increasingly, is no. More than half of Americans (59%) now say "I'm loyal to the show I like, not the provider". The age of brand loyalty could be giving way to something far more fickle and far harder to monetize.

Streaming services have fought fiercely for the coveted title of 'Forever Subscription', a service that consumers would keep no matter what. But the reality is becoming more complex as loyalty disconnects from brands and shifts to shows.

As consumers care less about where content comes from, many viewers have stopped keeping track. More than a third of Americans (37%) can't remember which service they watched a show on - even for the biggest shows with the biggest marketing budgets.

More surprisingly, this figure rises to nearly half of Gen Z (46%) and Millennials (46%) who say they can't remember which service they watched a show on

Where does loyalty lie?



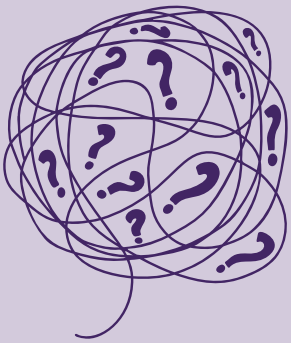
37%

of Americans can't remember which service they watched a show on

59%

of Americans now say "I'm loyal to the show I like, not the provider"

Content confusion:



17% of Americans thought *The Boys* was a Prime Video show

16% think *Ted Lasso* is on Apple TV

44% of consumers correctly recognizing *Stranger Things* as a Netflix show. Netflix leads the competition in brand awareness

If consumers can't remember which services host which shows, they're going to struggle to search for and find content. Already 29% of Americans use recommendations for films and shows rather than actively searching for what to watch, and a quarter (24%) now use TV voice controls, reducing time spent with streaming app interfaces. For those streaming services, this shift marks the start of traditional discovery models becoming obsolete.

The battleground is shifting from how subscriptions are sold to how they are found. As viewers focus on content over services, access matters as much as awareness - meaning that for subscription services, the lesson is clear. If consumers can't find you through the front door, you'd better make sure you're available through every side entrance: **bundles, partnerships, resellers and beyond.**

The UK perspective

This trend is even stronger in the UK. With three-in-five Brits (60%) stating that they're loyal to the shows they like rather than the provider, nearly half (44%) regularly forget which streaming service they watched a show on.

Brits are also worse at remembering which flagship show belongs to each service.

Just 20% of respondents correctly thought *Star Wars: Andor* was on Disney+, while only **13%** thought *Severance* was on Apple TV. And only **18%** of Brits were correct in thinking that *Game of Thrones* and *House of the Dragon* were from HBO Max. In fact, more than half (**54%**) thought it was on a rival streaming service, with a quarter (**25%**) saying Netflix.

© Bango 2026

3 Content overload

As consumers learn to navigate this new era of content discovery, they also face a different challenge: when you have this many options, how do you decide?

As more services enter the market and content libraries continue to grow, nearly a third of Americans (30%) say they sometimes spend longer finding what to watch than actually watching.

According to the Bango data, over a quarter (29%) spend 30+ minutes browsing streaming services to decide what to watch, rising to a staggering 48% for Gen Z. Yet, after all that searching, 25% say that they "frequently" abandon shows after just three episodes and move onto something else.

But here's the real paradox: despite having access to thousands of shows and films, 25% of Americans feel they've "run out" of things to watch. The content isn't the problem. The overwhelm is. And this overwhelming selection of content spread across platforms is leading to choice paralysis.

25% of Americans feel they've 'run out' of things to watch

Percentage of users who say they've 'run out' of things to watch by streaming service:

34% Of Apple TV subscribers say they've 'run out' of things to watch

32% Of Disney+ subscribers say they can't find anything to watch

30% Of Netflix subscribers say there's nothing they want to watch

The UK perspective

The data suggests that the UK is also spoiled for choice. Two-fifths (41%) spend more than 30 minutes browsing to decide what to watch, with the majority of Gen Z Brits (56%) saying the same. Similarly, 42% say choosing what to watch often takes longer than actually watching it.

A third (33%) of Brits say they've "run out" of things to watch on streaming services and 35% "frequently" abandon shows within the first three episodes.



© Bango 2026

4 AI control

So what happens when choosing gets too hard? Consumers disconnect from choosing anything at all and hand it to the machines.

One in five Americans (22%) would consider letting AI decide what shows, films or music they stream in the future, doubling to 40% of Gen Z.

While most would hand over control for convenience, more than a quarter of Americans (27%) - and 40% of Gen Z - think AI would suggest better content than they could find themselves.

Motivations for giving AI control:

22% let AI pick what they watch to "reduce time spent scrolling on streaming platforms."

21% think letting AI pick shows would "reduce arguments about what to watch."

However, some Americans are willing to relinquish control over more than just content. Some want AI to control every aspect of their subscriptions - 20% would let AI automatically subscribe, manage and unsubscribe them from their services.

Among Gen Z this figure rises to 40%, suggesting that AI-driven subscription management could quickly become the "new normal" as younger, more AI-savvy consumers gain spending power.

For consumers, AI-managed subscriptions mean liberation. No more scrolling, no more decision fatigue, no more admin.

For content providers, it means something very different: another layer between you and your customer. When an algorithm decides what someone watches - and what they subscribe to - the brand behind the content risks fading from view. This is the choice disconnect and it may be the most consequential of all.

The UK perspective

With Brits statistically being more likely to experience content overload, it's unsurprising that they're more open to AI taking control.

A third (33%) would consider letting AI decide the content they stream in the future, with this figure skyrocketing to nearly half of Gen Z (48%).

The UK also shares similar motivations for handing over decision-making power. More than a third (35%) think AI would reduce time spent searching, 36% think it would reduce arguments about what to watch and 42% think it would suggest better content.

© Bango 2026

5 Expect indirect



By now, the pattern should be unmistakable. Consumers are finding workarounds on price. They're forgetting which content lives on what platform. They're ready to let AI make the decisions.

As a result? Nearly a third of Americans (31%) say they're "done with standalone subscriptions." Among Gen Z, it's 48%. Instead, they're relying on bundles and intermediaries.

The direct subscriber - the person who opens your app and enters their card details - is, for some brands, becoming an endangered species. So one thing is clear: basing your growth model on direct subscriber acquisition alone isn't enough. Indirect needs to be standard procedure.

Fundamentally, having the option to go indirect for subscriptions has moved from a preference to an expectation. Nearly half of Americans (48%) and 55% of Gen Z, now expect subscriptions to be included with their internet, TV or mobile plan.

For those that can provide indirect access, this market shift presents an obvious opportunity for growth.

For telcos and other resellers: consumers will actively reward the brands that give them indirect access. More than three-fifths of Americans (62%) say they'd be more loyal to a telco that helps them save on subscriptions. Half (51%) would switch mobile or internet provider for discounted streaming. So the message to resellers is clear: bundle subscriptions not just for greater acquisition but for a massive retention boost too.

For subscription providers: the audience that's drifting from your direct channels hasn't disappeared. They're subscribing through new routes. Expanding into bundles and partnerships is how you reach the growing majority who might never download your app. Increase your reach and meet audiences where they want to be met.

Snapshot:

55%
Of Gen Z expect subscriptions included with their internet, TV or mobile plan

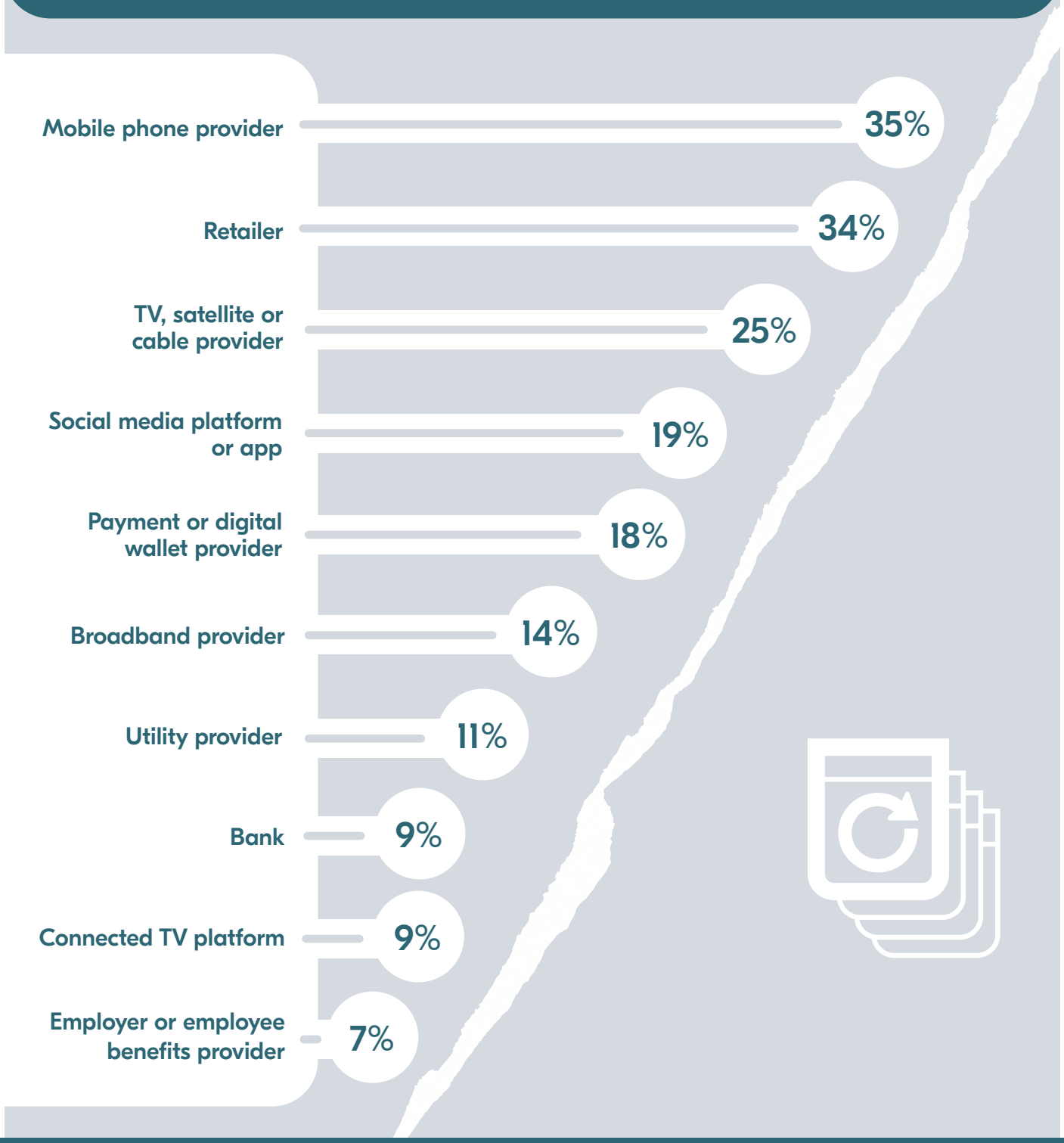
48%
Of Gen Z rely on bundles and intermediaries

31%
Of Americans say they are done with standalone subscriptions

48%
Of Americans expect subscriptions included with their internet, TV or mobile plan

© Bango 2026

Where do Americans currently get their indirect subscriptions:



The UK perspective

37% want bundles & deals

The UK data suggests Brits are trending towards indirect at a faster rate. More than a third (37%) say that, unless they can find a bundle or deal, they won't sign up for a subscription. What's more, 61% of Brits now expect streaming services to be included with their internet, TV or mobile plan. While Brits love indirect subscriptions, they love those that provide them even more! Nearly three quarters (71%) are more loyal to telcos that help them save money on their subscriptions and 58% would switch mobile or internet provider for discounted subscriptions.

bango.com

© Bango 2026

6 Reconnecting in the indirect era

In this report, we've isolated the signals leading to the great disconnect. Changing subscriber behaviors are driving subscription brands and content providers into this new disconnected world, where direct acquisition is no longer the only, or even primary, acquisition growth path. As content discovery fragments and budgets tighten, consumers are increasingly accessing subscriptions - sometimes exclusively - through bundles, marketplaces and third parties like telcos.

Each aspect of the disconnect would demand a strategic rethink on its own. Together, they represent a structural transformation of how the world subscribes.

This transformation also creates space. In that space, there's enormous opportunity for those who move fast enough to fill it. We're entering the next phase of subscription growth.

A glimpse of the future: the view from GEN Z

Gen Z leads across almost every metric in this report, from indirect subscriptions to AI-managed services. And as these younger consumers gain more spending power and their behaviors become more mainstream, the current status quo of direct subscriptions looks likely to collapse.

55% say they expect subscriptions to be included with their internet, TV or mobile plan

48% say they are "done" with direct standalone subscriptions

40% would let AI automatically subscribe, manage and unsubscribe them from their subscription services

Broad distribution across bundles now becomes the defining competitive advantage in the subscription economy. For content providers, this is both an existential threat and a massive opportunity for growth. Expanding into as many different partnership channels as possible helps services reach audiences who may never subscribe directly, while boosting visibility in a crowded market. Meanwhile, for telcos, subscriptions are a loyalty lever. Bundling the services that consumers love into existing offers or bills strengthens retention, differentiates from competitors and delivers more value to customers.

Bundle or be bundled

The content providers and resellers who build for indirect access now will own the next era of subscription growth. Reconnecting happens by meeting consumers where they are. Those who don't do that will be watching from the sidelines.

© Bango 2026

The great disconnect is a growth opportunity. Here's the infrastructure to seize it

Consumers are subscribing more than ever, but they're doing it through bundles, partnerships and third parties. For subscription providers, that means the path to growth now runs through resellers - indirect channels to market. For telcos and other resellers, it means subscriptions are your most powerful loyalty tool — if you have the platform to deliver them.

The Digital Vending Machine® (DVM™) from Bango gives you that platform.

1. It manages the complexity required to deliver safe, predictable outcomes for all parties - from offer, eligibility and entitlement management to use cases such as upgrades, price changes and account recovery, as well as billing and charging.
2. It provides all the capabilities to deliver the most innovative, advanced bundles, including multi-party bundles like Verizon offering Netflix and HBO Max as a MyPlan perk.
3. It facilitates network intelligence where industry learnings, such as what works best and what to avoid, can be applied immediately to avoid costly "trial-and-error".

The DVM™ enables telcos and other resellers to easily build partnerships, create compelling bundles and deliver the indirect access layer that today's subscribers expect. Because in the age of the great disconnect, being easy to find is the new competitive advantage.



© Bango 2026

We'll help you capture the next phase of subscription growth

Find out how the Digital Vending Machine® from Bango helps you build the access layer for a subscription economy shaped by indirect access, AI-led discovery and bundle-first growth.



Visit: bango.com or
Contact: sales@bango.com

What comes next?

With Gen Z stepping into household spending power and expectations shifting fast, the subscription market is entering a new phase. Want to know what's coming next?

Read 'The future of bundling waits for no one' for the strategic roadmap and why the window to act is closing faster than you think...

Scan me to download your free copy of 'The future of bundling waits for no one'

© Bango 2026

bango®

Bango PLC
Matrix House
Cambridge Business Park
Milton Road
Cambridge CB4 0WG

Registered in England
No. 05386079

contact: sales@bango.com

bango.com

