

PROJECT #2

# Sling Freestream: Freemium Expansion

Expanding a subscription ecosystem with a freemium tier

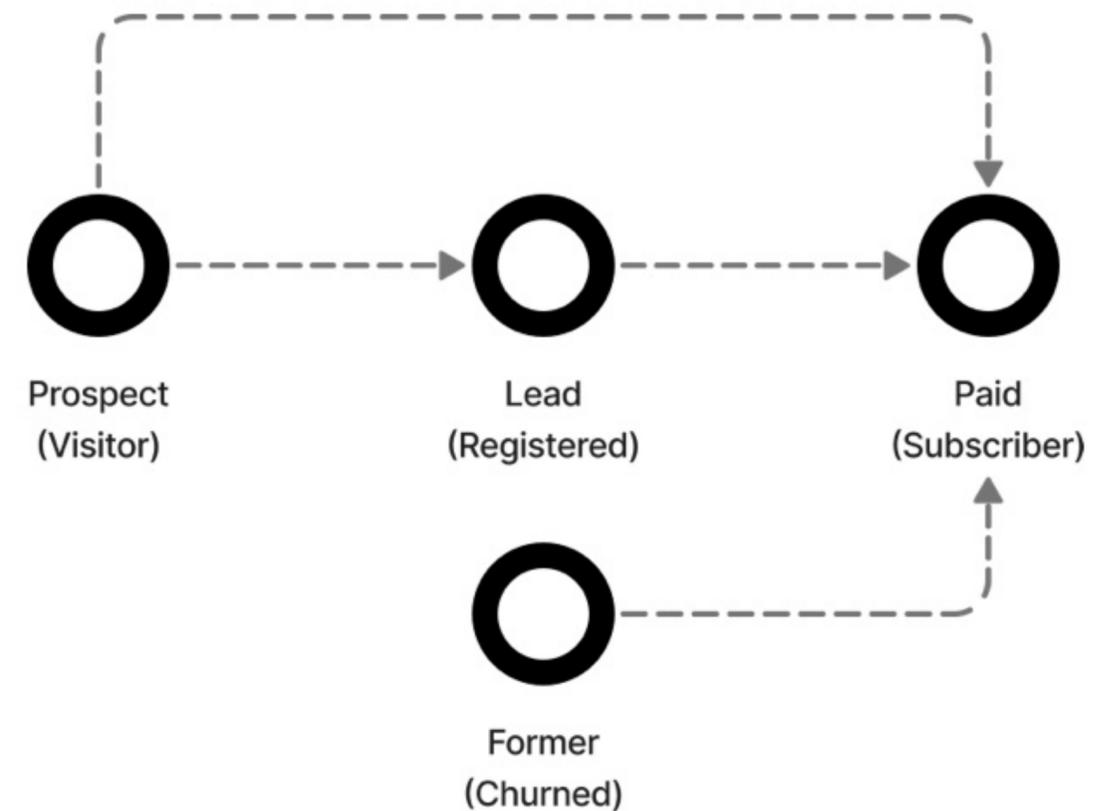
Role: Lead UX Designer

Team: Lead UX Designer, Lead Product Manager, Marketing Manager

## SUMMARY

# Grew viewership and ad revenue through free-tier expansion—while protecting paid subscribers.

- Defined the integrated free-first model and guardrails — aligning senior leadership and PM on a single IA strategy
- Designed the end-to-end funnel: Prospect → Lead → Paid, plus Former → Winback, with contextual upsell at each stage.
- Shipped MVP via staged rollout (1% → 5% → ...), validating with live behavioral signals before scaling



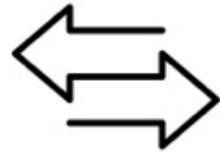
## MY ROLE

# I led Freestream UX end-to-end, from system definition to MVP launch.



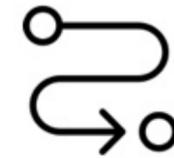
### North Star & Guardrails

Defined the north star, success metrics, and guardrails – including "no paid cannibalization" – with WAU, time-to-first-video, and ad opportunities as key signals.



### Trade-offs & Alignment

Led the integrated vs. split decision – built mockups, ran usability testing, and presented to senior leadership to align on one IA with layered entitlement.



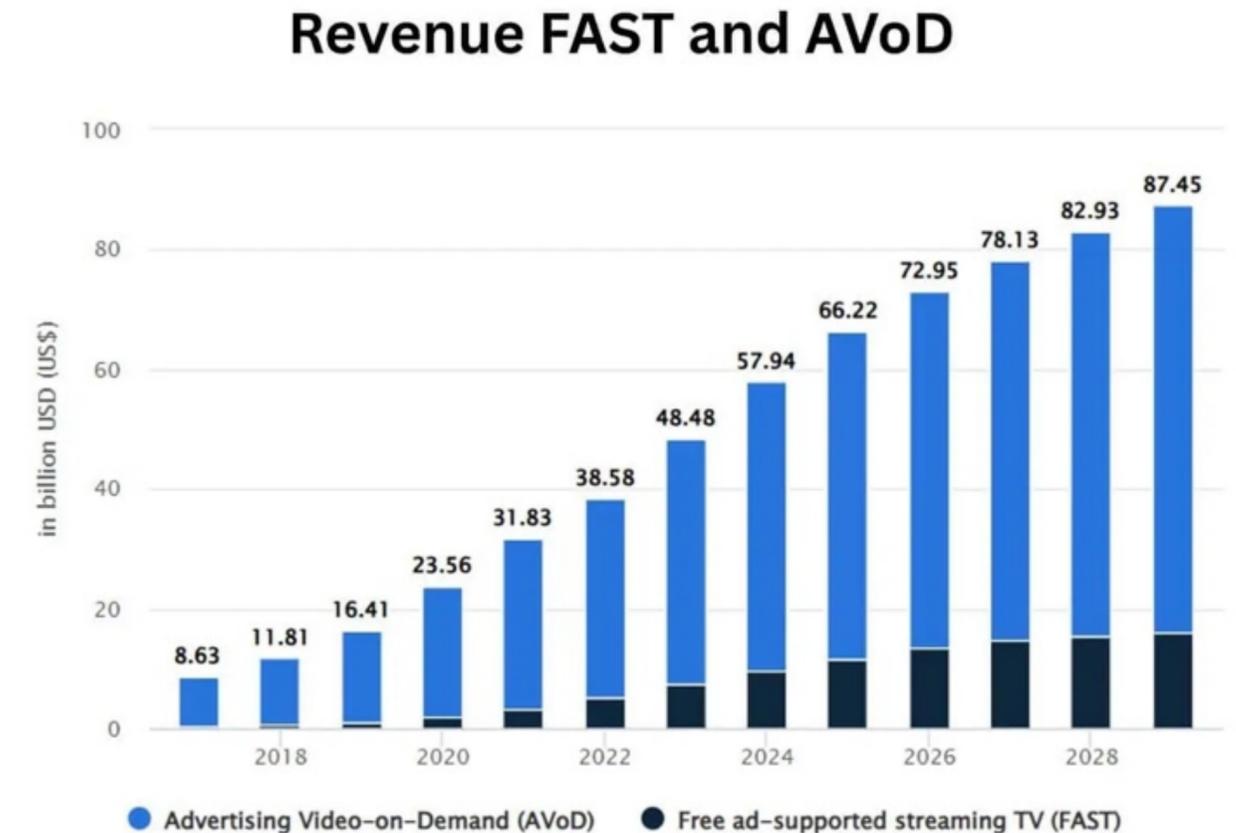
### System Design & Delivery

Designed the full pipeline (Access → Auth → FTUX → Viewing → Upsell) and shipped MVP on Roku + Browser, iterating through phased rollout.

## CONTEXT

# AVOD growth created a new acquisition channel – free-first, without cannibalizing paid.

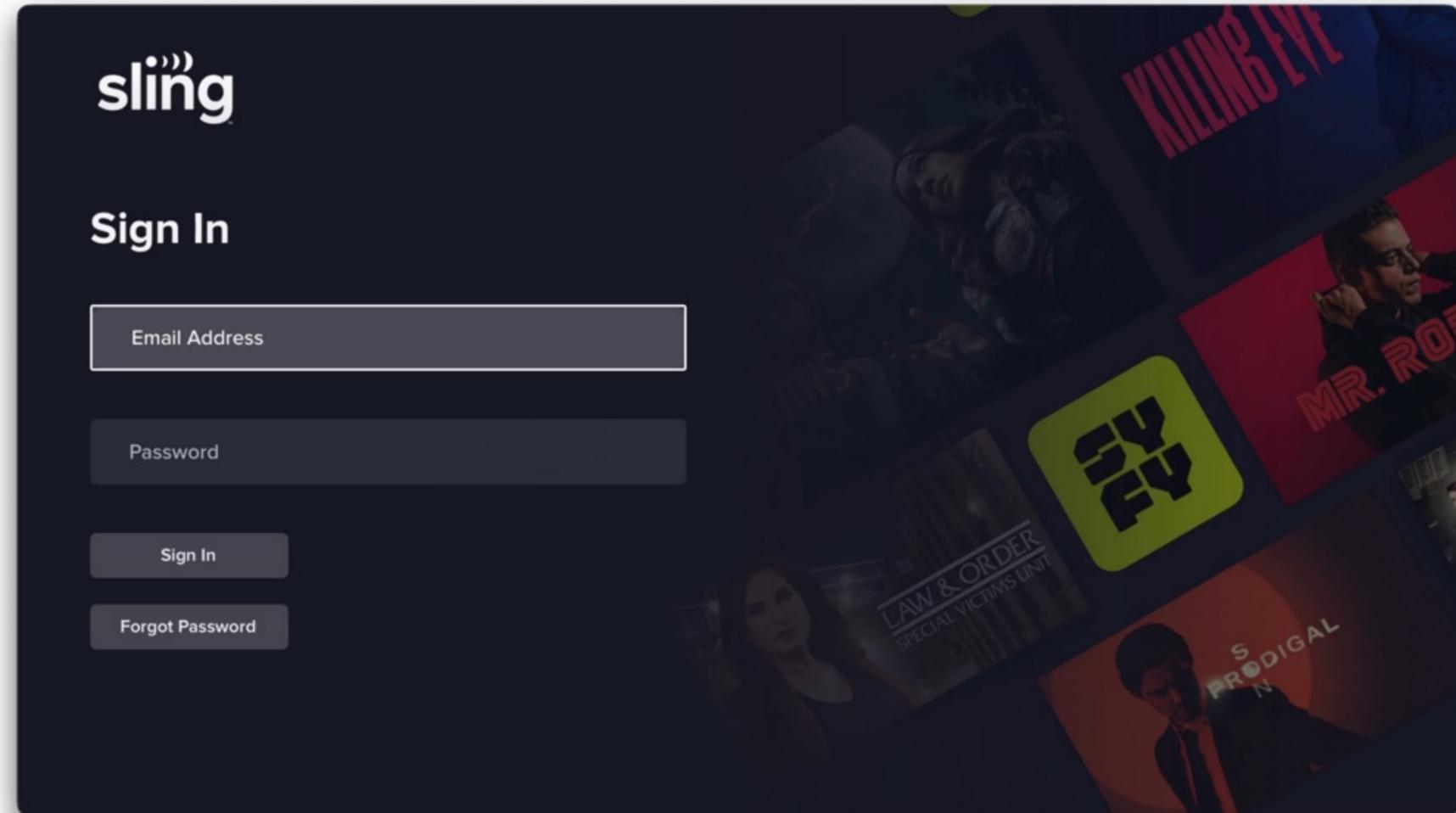
- The AVOD market was growing rapidly (8.6B → 87B projected by 2028), but Sling's paywall-first model was blocking new user acquisition.
- The opportunity: expand reach and monetize through ads – without cannibalizing our core subscription business.
- My framing: Treat Freestream as an ecosystem expansion, not a separate product – one IA, layered access.



## CORE PROBLEM

# Paywall-first blocked first watch—hurting acquisition and limiting the ecosystem.

- For new and returning users, the paywall often appeared before value was experienced, creating early drop-off.
- I needed to shift the entry point — watch first, then convert contextually, while protecting paid health.
- Key question: “How do we unlock free viewing without fragmenting the product or creating long-term UX and engineering debt?”



# Define success—and protect the subscription core while scaling free.



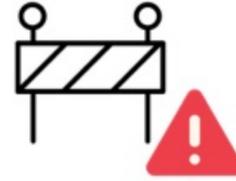
## North Star

- Experience value first
- Hours Watched ↑
- Ecosystem reach ↑



## Success signals

- WAU / engaged user share ↑
- Time to first video ↓
- Ad opportunities ↑
- Upsell/upgrade intent ↑



## Guardrails

- Paid health stable — No cannibalization
- Playback success rate stable — Reliability Index maintained



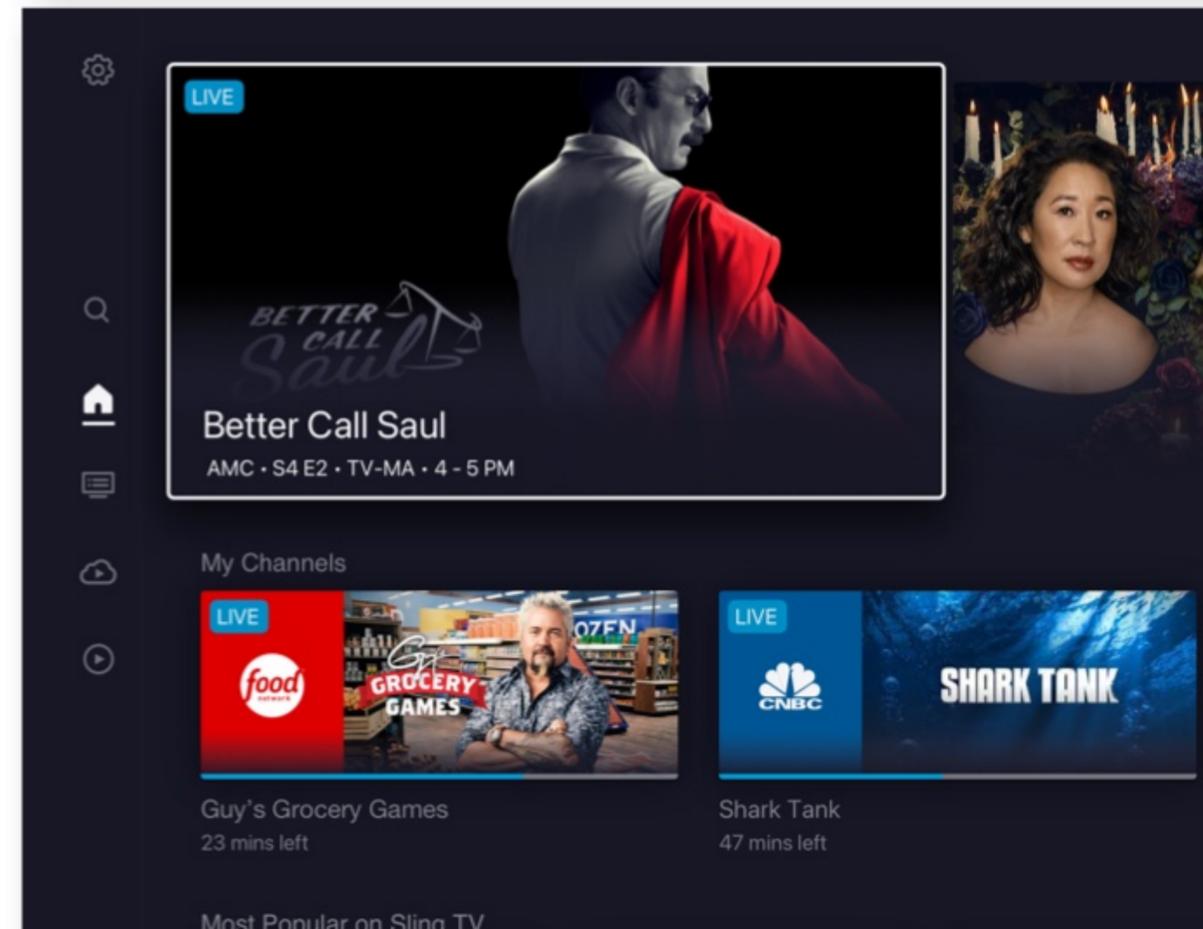
## Validation

- Roku staged rollout
- (1% → 5% → ...) with monitoring before expanding

## KEY DECISION

# Kept Freestream integrated: one IA, with layered access (no split nav).

- I advocated for a different direction: two IAs would create UX fragmentation across platforms and long-term design/eng debt.
- My recommendation: One IA + entitlement layers (labels, gates, contextual prompts per user state) – same navigation, different messages
- Validated with mockup testing + usability sessions with real users before aligning senior leadership



## Decision Matrix

Option	A: Paywall-first	B: Split Free	C: Integrated Free-first
First-watch friction	High	Low	Low
Discovery + conversion	Limited	Fragmented	Unified
Upsell approach	Forced early	Weaker surface	Contextual
Ad reach	Limited	Strong	Strong
Paid cannibalization risk	Low	Med	Managed
Time to ship	Fast	Med	Fast (P0)

"I drove alignment on Option C – lowest first-watch friction, unified discovery, and manageable cannibalization risk."

# An end-to-end Freestream system—clear rules across access, auth, viewing, and conversion.



**"A rules-based pipeline across user types and platforms – edge cases/platform specific"**

- One IA + layers: Mark Free vs. Paid with labels, gates, and prompts.
- Rules pipeline: Access → Auth → FTUX → Viewing → Upsell → Brand.
- By user type: Same IA, different messages/entry points (Prospect / Lead / Former / Paid).
- Prompt timing: Ask for sign-in or upgrade only when it fits the user's intent.

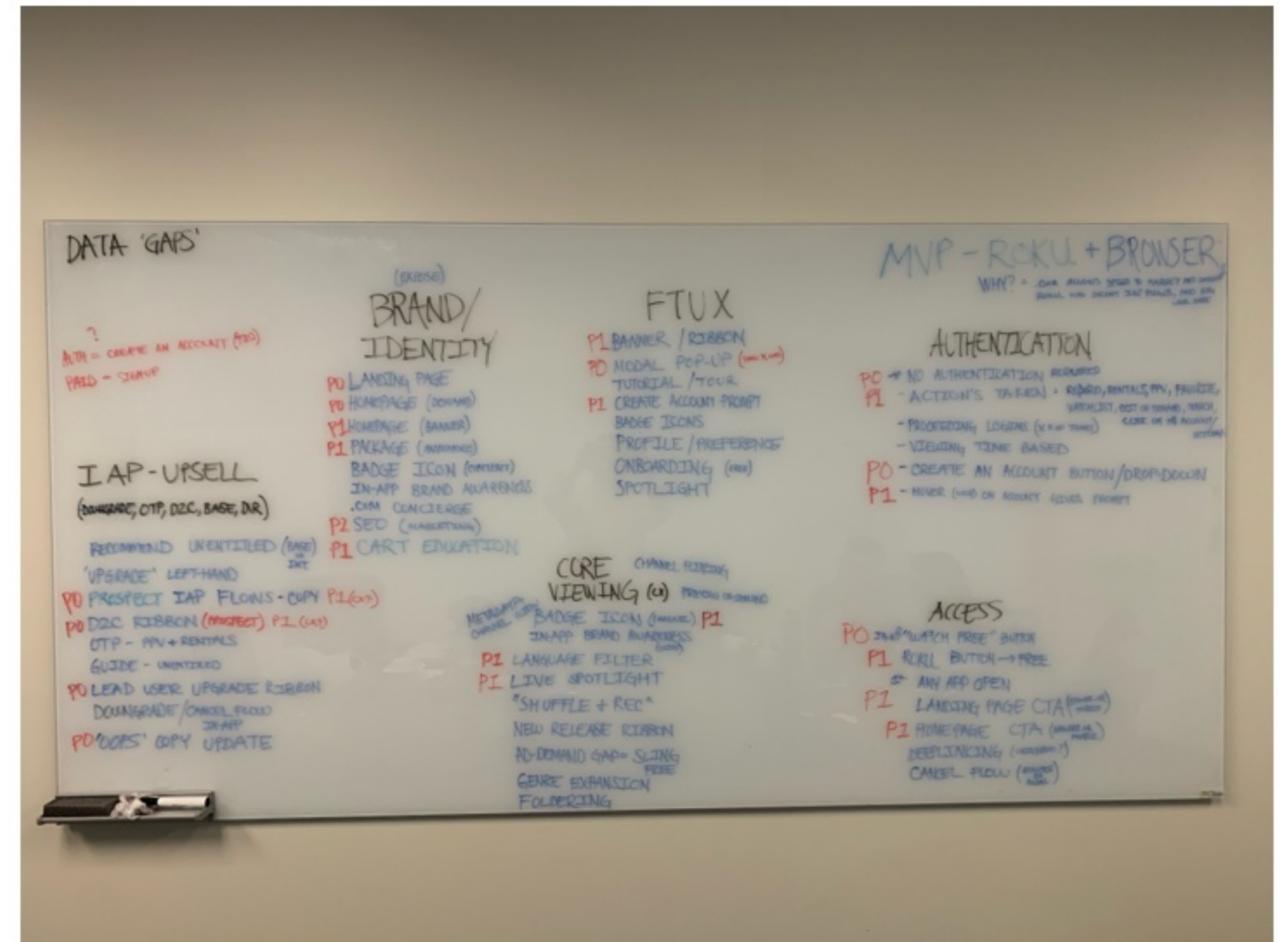
“A single IA with layered entitlement: prompts vary by touchpoint and user state, not by navigation.”

## Entitlement Matrix

Touchpoint	Prospect (Anon)	Lead (Free acct)	Paid (Subscriber)	Former (Lapsed)
Freestream Landing Page (Web)	Stream Free CTA · Create acct · Compare plans	Sign in · Continue · Upgrade	Sign in · Manage sub	Sign in · Restart
Entry / Home (banner/rail)	Create acct · Free DVR 10h	Upgrade plans · More channels	Add-ons spotlight · DVR upgrade	Welcome back · Restart
Content Detail	Save/Record → Sign up	Locked title → Plans	Add this add-on	Restart to watch
Player / Playback gate	Sign up to continue	Subscribe to watch	Upgrade DVR · Add-on	Restart flow
Guide / Channel	Plan required · Sign up	Compare plans · Subscribe	Upgrade plan (streams/locals)	Plan required · Restart
DVR (limit/storage)	Record → Sign up (10h)	10h limit · Upgrade DVR	Add Unlimited DVR	Restore via restart
Account / Settings / My Account	Create account	Compare plans · Subscribe	Edit subscription · Add extras	Restart subscription

# Scoped for speed – ship fast, then iterate with guardrails (Roku-first)."

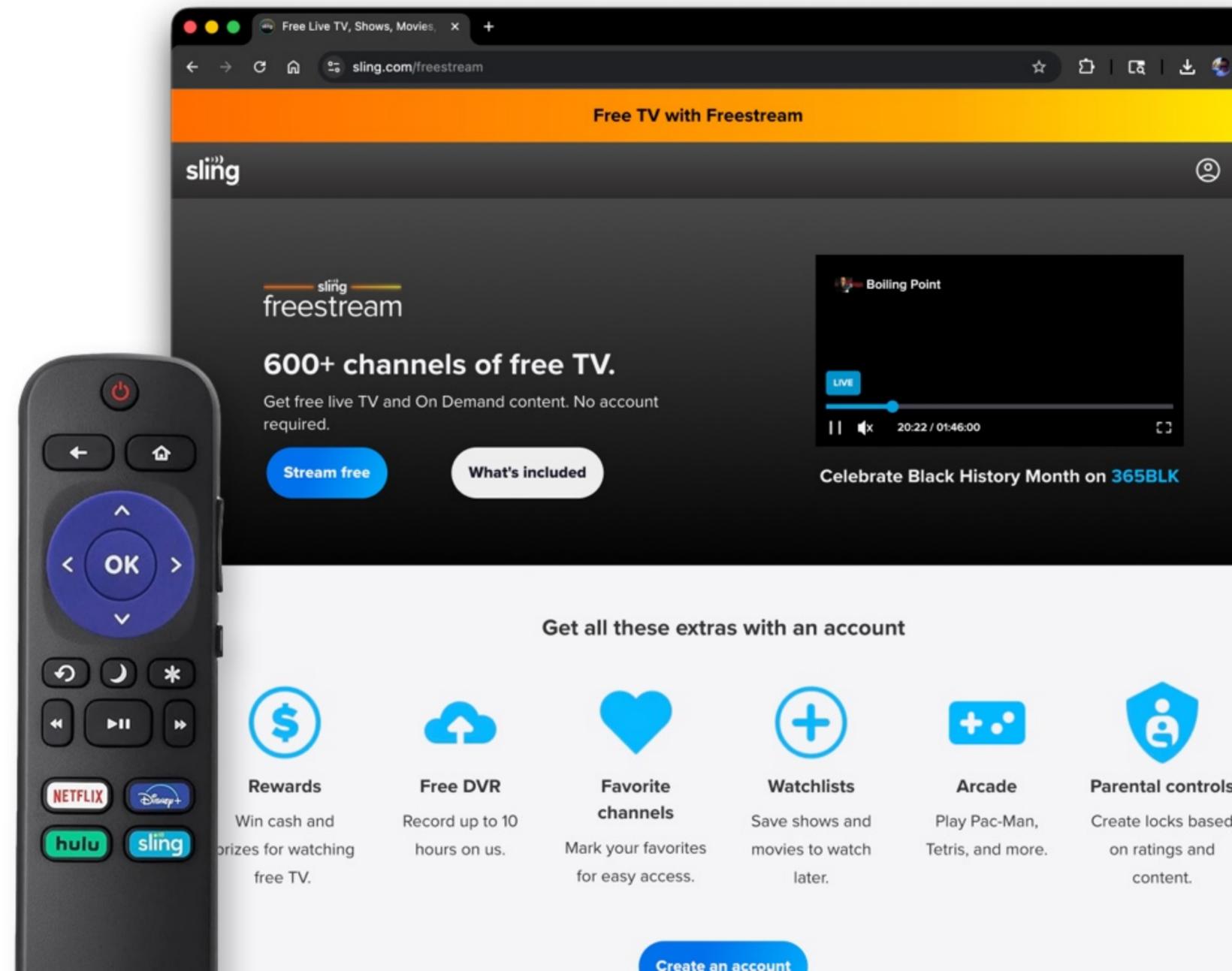
- Why Roku first: 40%+ of users + remote-first entry point = highest-leverage surface with lowest eng complexity for MVP
- P0 (ship to learn): Watch Free entry · No sign-in · Light FTUX · Landing page · Browse → Play labels · Contextual upsell
- P1 (iterate): Based on P0 behavioral data, deeper discovery · Preferences/onboarding · Upsell tuning
- Rollout: staged release (1% → 5% → ...) with guardrails before scaling



## EXECUTION

# Shipped an MVP on Roku + Browser to speed first watch and safely tune ads/upsell loops.

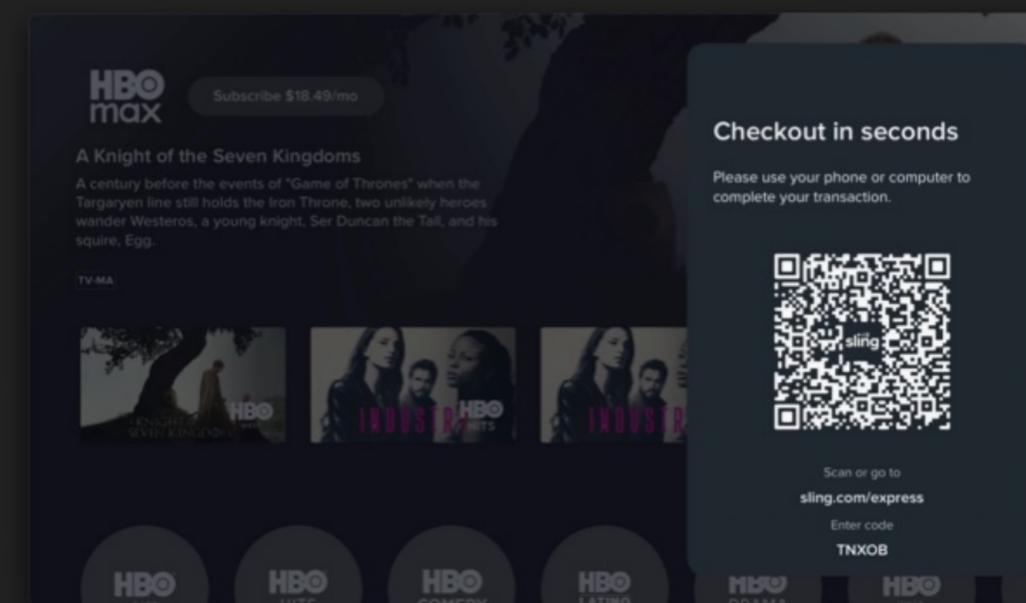
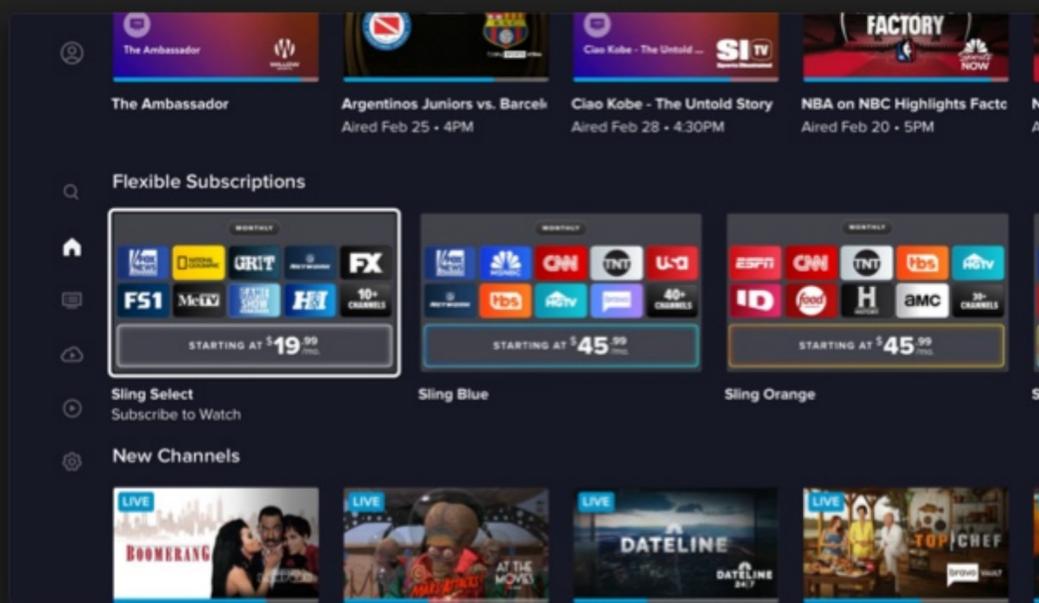
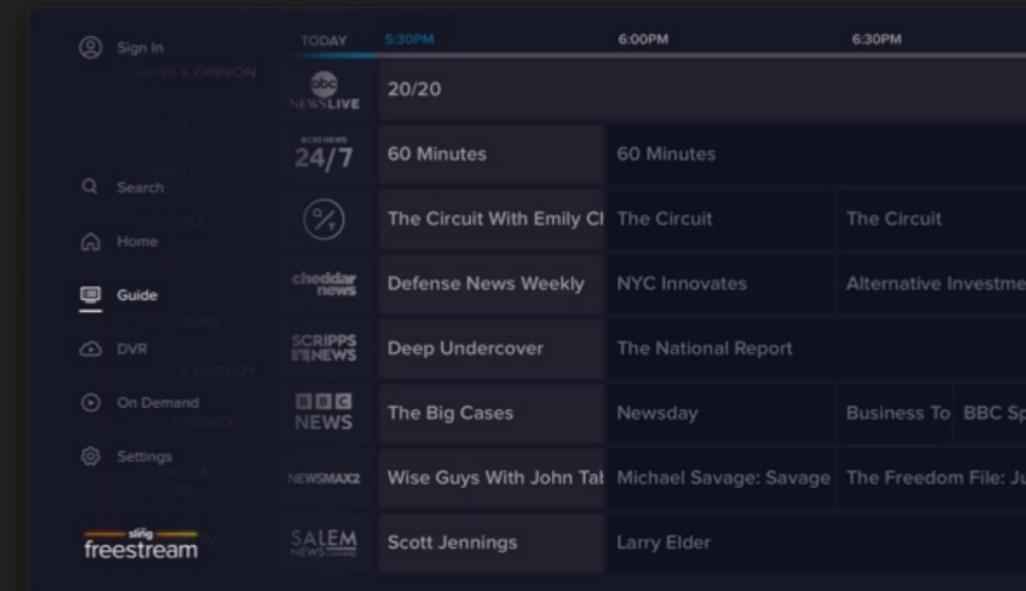
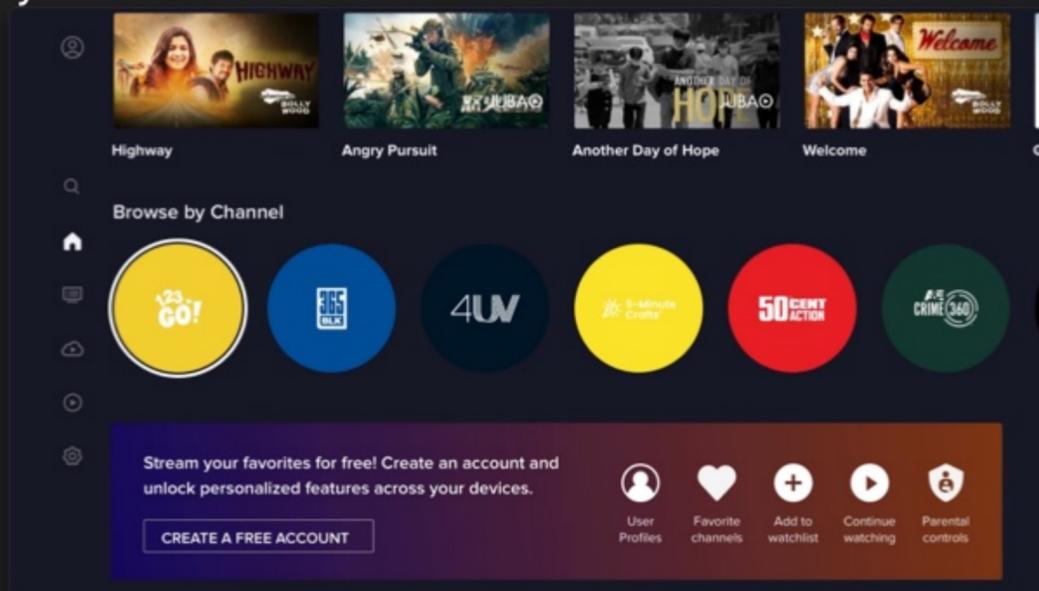
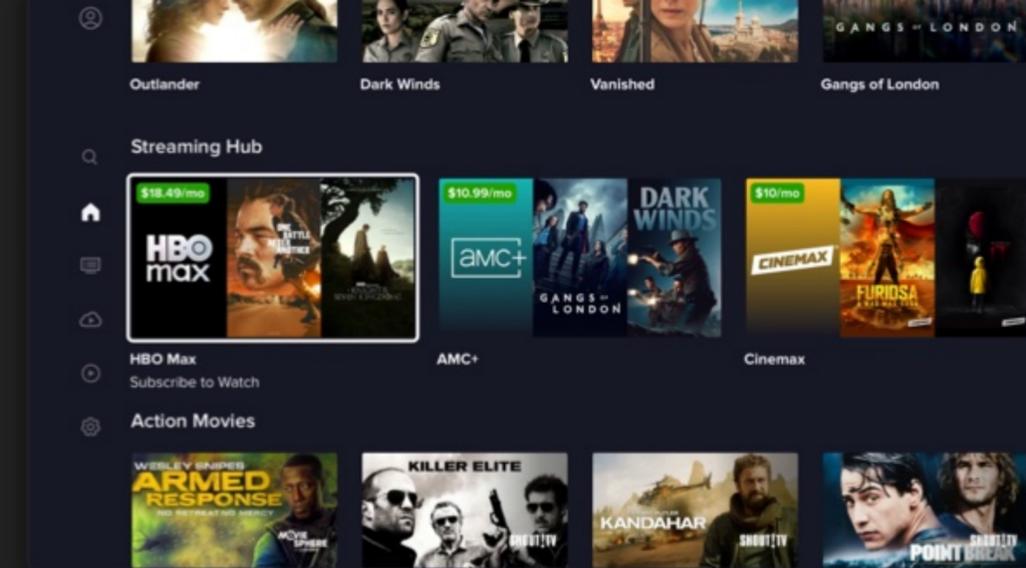
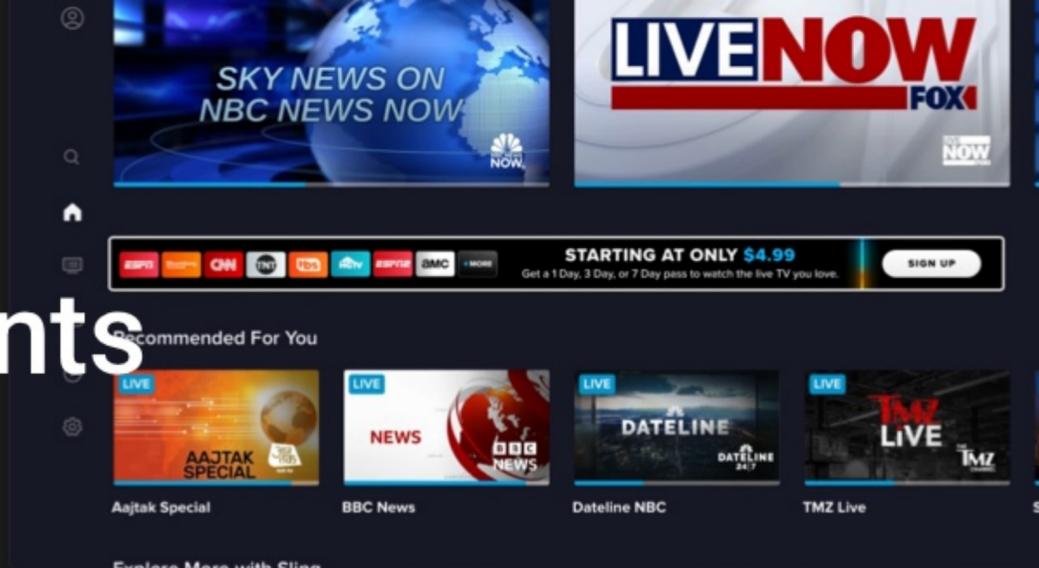
- Roku nudge: Mapped the Roku "Sling TV" button to Freestream (Play Free) to remove search/signup friction (40%+ of base).
- Free-first entry: Let users browse + watch free without auth, then prompt contextually based on intent.
- Staged rollout: Rolled out Roku gradually (1% → 5% → ...) while monitoring paid health + playback.
- Landing page A/B testing: Tested CTAs and hero content to drive Prospect → Lead conversion — Sign Up framed around free benefits (DVR, favorites, watchlist), no payment required."





# Monetization moments

Design principle: "Never block the free experience — surface upgrade intent only when the user has already expressed desire."



## IMPACT

# Grew the ecosystem through free-first entry—while protecting the subscription business.

Free-first model grew reach and ad revenue — and paid health guardrails held throughout.

↑ **18%**

### Viewership

YoY per subscriber

**1.2B**

### Ad Inventory

Monthly Ad Slots

↑ **37K**

### Net New Paid

Paid subs (2024)

**1.46%**

### Churn

FY 2024

( ↓ from 1.69%)

Program scale (company-level): 85% new households beyond linear TV · 500+ free channels

# Scaled consistency through rule-based design and rollout governance.



- Defined Free vs Paid rules (labels, gates, prompts) to keep one experience consistent at scale
- Mapped prompt placements across key touchpoints × user types (Prospect/Lead/Paid/Former)
- Ran cross-team rollout checkpoints (PM/Eng/Ads/Marketing) tied to metrics + guardrails
- Kept a shared decision log and experiment tracker — so design changes and A/B results were visible and aligned across the team.

## CLOSING

# What I drove—and what I learned.

### What I drove:

- Defined a free-first, guardrail-driven model that expanded the ecosystem without hurting paid
- Led the integrated IA decision — aligned senior leadership with mockups, usability testing, and business framing
- Shipped MVP and iterated through staged rollout using behavioral signals

### What I learned:

- Contextual prompts beat early gates — users convert after experiencing value, not before
- Shipping to 1% first gave us real data to iterate on — faster and safer than waiting for perfection
- “No paid cannibalization” as a guardrail made every design decision more intentional