

SOLUTION BRIEF

What's the real impact of ExpressPlay DRM?

Advantages of a next-gen
DRM architecture

Building trust for a connected world.

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Beyond a simple tech requirement

For today's streaming world, digital rights management (DRM) is no longer just a security checkbox, it's a strategic growth driver.

DRM solution is often seen as just another technical hurdle, something to implement in the background to satisfy studios or regulators. But this narrow view can quietly undermine your business. The hidden cost of DRM becomes apparent when what seems like a simple requirement leads to outages, compliance failures, or device incompatibility—ultimately eroding revenue, frustrating customers, and hindering market expansion.

Modern DRM has evolved far beyond basic protection. It's now a strategic tool that can unlock new markets, improve

customer retention, and directly impact your bottom line. ExpressPlay exemplifies this shift, transforming content protection from a cost center into a growth enabler.

With comprehensive support for industry-standard protocols including Marlin DRM alongside Widevine, FairPlay, and PlayReady, ExpressPlay ensures maximum device compatibility and content security across all platforms. In this paper, we'll explore how ExpressPlay's approach to DRM not only safeguards your content but also drives measurable business outcomes—helping you turn compliance into competitive advantage.



True cost of DRM failures

The financial and operational risks of inadequate DRM are significant, with real-world consequences for content owners and distributors.

When DRM fails—whether due to weak protection, lack of scalability, or poor device and regional support—the impact is felt across revenue, customer loyalty, and long-term business viability.

Revenue loss points

Geographic revenue loss represents one of the most pressing challenges facing content providers today. Piracy remains a top threat to streaming media—it's no longer limited to illegal downloads.

In 2023, global piracy websites received over 229 billion visits, a 6.7% increase year-over-year.¹ The same report estimates digital piracy is costing the industry \$75 billion annually, with 80% of that tied to streaming theft. Inadequate DRM can block access to lucrative markets if your system doesn't comply with regional regulations or support local devices. This means missing out on high-growth regions and leaving significant revenue on the table.

Churn reality and customer switching behaviors reveal another critical vulnerability in streaming operations. When viewers encounter playback issues, often tied to DRM failures, they are quick to leave. Research shows that a single negative streaming experience for 10 seconds can prompt up to 20% of viewers² to change providers. This churn directly translates to lost recurring revenue and increased acquisition costs that compound over time.

Viewer abandonment patterns demonstrate how even seemingly minor technical issues can have substantial revenue impacts. Even minor delays or errors can drive viewers away from content and platforms. For example, a one-second delay in video start time can reduce engagement by 6%,³ and repeated interruptions cause users to abandon content altogether, eroding lifetime value and diminishing the return on content investments.

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Proof points

Real-world examples illustrate the tangible costs of DRM failures across different scenarios and platforms. During the launch of Samsung Blu-ray players with BD+ DRM, a class-action lawsuit was filed after thousands of customers discovered their devices could not play many protected discs, leaving them unable to access purchased content. This incident not only led to direct financial loss for Samsung but also damaged their reputation and customer trust in ways that extended far beyond the immediate technical issue.

Live sports broadcasters and streaming platforms regularly face DRM-induced outages when infrastructure can't keep up with surges in license requests. For example, poorly optimized key delivery or authentication delays can disrupt viewing for thousands during championship games or global events, causing widespread complaints and lost ad or subscription revenue. These high-stakes moments, when audiences are most engaged and valuable, become costly missed opportunities.

Scaling challenges during peak demand periods create some of the most visible and damaging DRM failures. Inability to scale DRM license delivery during peak demand leads to mass service disruptions. This not only frustrates viewers but also results in missed advertising opportunities, lost pay-per-view sales, and a lasting hit to brand credibility that can take months or years to recover from.

The cumulative impact of these failures extends beyond immediate technical problems. Every technical failure from piracy to compliance gaps or inability to scale translates into measurable business costs, including lost revenue, increased churn, higher support expenses, and long-term reputational harm. As streaming audiences grow and expectations for seamless experiences continue to rise, the cost and risk of DRM failure only increase, making robust protection systems not just a technical necessity but a business imperative.

The ExpressPlay difference: business impact

While most DRM solutions focus on what they protect, ExpressPlay delivers results that directly impact your business growth.

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Expansion and coverage

A robust DRM solution like ExpressPlay empowers content providers to reach audiences across platforms and has served 60 billion+ licenses in the last five years. ExpressPlay's multi-DRM approach, including Marlin DRM support, ensures compatibility with specialized devices and emerging markets where Marlin is the preferred standard. This wide device compatibility is essential for maximizing audience reach and ensuring a seamless user experience regardless of hardware.

At the same time, ExpressPlay's support for regional compliance allows services to expand into new markets without legal or technical barriers, unlocking revenue from previously inaccessible regions. By bridging both device and regulatory gaps, ExpressPlay turns coverage into a strategic business advantage.

Customer retention

ExpressPlay's reliability is a critical factor in keeping viewers engaged and loyal. High playback success rates and minimal errors ensure that users can watch content without interruption, even during peak demand or live events. This seamless experience is especially important as audiences increasingly expect to start watching on one device and continue on another without hassle. By reducing playback failures and supporting cross-device use, ExpressPlay helps providers minimize churn and build long-term customer relationships.

Operational efficiency

ExpressPlay's cloud-native architecture eliminates the need for costly on-premise infrastructure, reducing both capital and operational expenses. Automated compliance monitoring and license management free up engineering teams from manual, repetitive tasks, allowing them to focus on innovation and faster content launches. This streamlined approach not only lowers total cost of ownership but also accelerates time-to-market, achieving peak transactions per second (TPS) of 42,000 and a year-over-year uptime of 99.99%.

Scale performance

ExpressPlay is designed to handle the demands of major live events and sudden traffic spikes, scaling automatically to maintain smooth playback for millions of concurrent viewers. Its global, cloud-based infrastructure ensures consistent performance and high availability, even during extended broadcasts or unexpected surges in demand. This reliability protects revenue during critical viewing moments and helps maintain viewer trust by delivering uninterrupted, high-quality streaming experiences.

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Traditional DRM vs. ExpressPlay

Traditional DRM solutions often rely on on-premise infrastructure, which leads to high upfront investment and ongoing maintenance costs. These legacy systems typically require dedicated staff to manage manual processes, from license provisioning to compliance reporting, which can slow down operations and divert engineering resources from innovation. When issues arise, emergency fixes and reactive troubleshooting are common, resulting in costly downtime and potential service interruptions.

In contrast, ExpressPlay's cloud-native approach eliminates the need for heavy infrastructure and leverages automation to streamline workflows, reducing both staffing requirements and operational complexity. Proactive monitoring and built-in audit tools further minimize compliance overhead, ensuring that regulatory requirements are met efficiently and reliably without burdening your team

Market trends

The OTT landscape is experiencing explosive growth, with global streaming subscribers projected to surpass 1.1 billion by 2025⁴ and total industry revenue expected to reach over \$443 billion by 2029.⁵ This surge is driven by consumers' appetite for on-demand, flexible viewing, and the convenience of accessing content from anywhere.

As the audience grows, so does the demand for multi-platform support. In 2024, 59% of OTT content consumption happened on apps—up from 40% the previous year⁶—with viewers now watching 1.5 billion minutes on mobile and TV apps⁷, nearly double the time spent on web platforms. More than 70% of viewers in emerging markets access OTT content via smartphones, and 65%⁸ of global streaming occurs on mobile and TV apps rather than browsers.

With this rapid expansion comes a rising importance of compliance automation. As providers scale across regions, they must navigate a patchwork of local regulations and privacy laws. Automated compliance tools are becoming essential, helping services avoid costly legal pitfalls and streamline operations in a global marketplace. The ability to deliver content securely and compliantly across devices and territories is now a baseline expectation for any OTT business scalability.



What's your DRM costing you?

Many streaming DRM solutions underestimate the hidden costs of their DRM solutions. Beyond the obvious licensing and infrastructure expenses, the wrong DRM approach can quietly drain revenue, slow down innovation, and put your platform at risk during critical moments. To truly understand the impact, it's essential to assess both operational pain points and strategic risks.

Assessment

- Are you losing revenue due to geo-restrictions or device incompatibility? If your DRM doesn't support all devices or comply with local regulations, you may be locked out of high-growth regions or unable to serve viewers on their preferred platforms, resulting in missed revenue opportunities.
- Are engineering teams overwhelmed by manual compliance tasks? Legacy DRM often requires constant manual updates and reporting to meet changing global regulations. This not only diverts engineering resources from high-value projects but also increases the risk of human error and compliance failures.
- Can your DRM scale during global events without impacting performance? Major live events and sudden traffic spikes are the ultimate test for any DRM system. If your platform can't scale seamlessly, you risk outages and degraded user experiences, which can lead to customer churn and reputational harm.

Decision matrix

- Build vs. buy: Weigh the long-term costs of developing and maintaining DRM in-house against the benefits of a managed service. Managed solutions often provide lower total cost of ownership, built-in compliance, and expert support, freeing your team to focus on growth.
- Risk assessment: Identify any gaps in your current DRM approach that could result in customer dissatisfaction, compliance violations, or security breaches. A robust risk assessment helps prioritize upgrades and avoid costly failures.
- Transformation timeline: Determine how quickly you can upgrade your DRM without disrupting your current operations. The right partner can support a phased rollout, ensuring business continuity while you modernize your platform.

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Next steps

To maximize the value of your content and future-proof your streaming DRM solution, it's essential to take a strategic approach to DRM modernization. Start by requesting an ExpressPlay DRM readiness assessment, which will help you identify gaps and opportunities in your current setup.

Benchmark your existing DRM performance, focusing on areas such as uptime, device compatibility, and compliance efficiency. From there, calculate the potential business impact of optimizing your DRM, considering both savings and improvements in viewer experience. When planning your implementation strategy, prioritize approaches that minimize disruption to your current operations. ExpressPlay's unified multi-DRM platform can simplify migration by providing consistent APIs and management interfaces across all supported protocols, including Marlin.

A phased rollout is often the most effective path, allowing you to integrate new DRM capabilities in stages while maintaining service continuity.

Establish a clear success measurement framework from the outset, tracking key metrics like system reliability, customer retention, and support ticket volume to ensure your investment delivers measurable results.

Looking ahead, treat DRM not just as a technical requirement but as a strategic advantage. A modern, cloud-native solution like ExpressPlay positions your business to adapt quickly to new devices, regulations, and market opportunities. By investing in future-ready DRM, you can deliver secure, seamless experiences to a global audience, turning content protection into a powerful driver of growth.



Conclusion

DRM is no longer just a technical safeguard, it's a vital enabler of revenue and business growth for streaming platforms and content owners.

By protecting content, ensuring only authorized users can access it, and supporting compliance with licensing agreements, DRM directly preserves and expands revenue streams in an increasingly digital-first world.

Treating DRM as a strategic advantage, rather than a cost center, empowers you to unlock new markets, experiment with flexible business models, and maintain control over your content across global platforms. As piracy and unauthorized distribution continue to threaten monetization, your content deserves more than basic protection; it requires a modern, business-focused DRM solution that turns security into a foundation for innovation and sustainable growth.

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Your content deserves more than basic protection; it requires a modern, business-focused DRM solution that turns security into a foundation for innovation and sustainable growth.



Learn more at:

expressplay.com/products/multi-drm

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