

Music Audiovisual - Film, TV & Radio Spotlight All Europe Countries International United Kingdom USA News

I (Don’t) Want My MTV

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MTV is set to shut down five music channels by the end of 2025, marking the end of an era in music video broadcasting. The closures reflect changing viewer habits and the shift towards digital platforms like YouTube and social media.

MTV is set to shut down five of its iconic music channels by 31 December 2025. The channels affected are MTV Music, MTV 80s, MTV 90s, Club MTV and MTV Live. This marks the end of nearly four decades of continuous music video broadcasting by MTV. However, the flagship MTV HD channel will remain on air and will focus mainly on reality programmes.

This decision reflects changing viewer habits, with music videos now being watched primarily on platforms such as YouTube and social media rather than on traditional TV. Paramount Global, MTV's parent company, is also seeking to cut costs globally, and this has played a role in the shutdown. The closures will first impact the UK and Ireland, followed by similar shutdowns across continental Europe and other markets, including Australia, Poland, France, and Brazil.

While the closures signal the demise of a traditional promotional method, they also reflect evolving viewing habits, where scheduled music video TV programming has experienced a dramatic decline in viewership. This shift means that visibility is increasingly dependent on platforms that use data-driven playlists and viral sharing, which puts those without a strong digital presence or marketing resources at a disadvantage.

MTV launched on 1 August 1981 as the first cable network

dedicated 24/7 to music videos. The first video played was “Video Killed the Radio Star” by The Buggles. MTV rapidly gained a cult following and reshaped music marketing and youth culture. In 1983, the “MTV Unplugged” series began, featuring acoustic performances by major artists and becoming a landmark music programme. The release of Michael Jackson's “Thriller” videos and related MTV specials in 1984 was a pivotal moment that cemented the channel's influence.

The first MTV Video Music Awards (VMAs) took place in 1987, establishing the iconic annual music celebration. At its peak in around 2011, MTV was available to approximately 99 million pay-television households in the US, though this figure had declined to around 67 million by 2023 as viewing habits shifted.

MTV popularised the music video format, turning it into a major marketing tool for artists and having a significant impact on their careers. The channel became a cultural touchstone for young people, blending music with vibrant, fast-paced visual storytelling to create the recognisable “MTV aesthetic” characterised by rapid editing and colourful imagery.

It also changed fashion, attitudes and artistic presentation. Artists such as Michael Jackson, Madonna, Prince, and Janet Jackson used music videos to entertain, push creative boundaries and address cultural themes such as empowerment and identity. The channel also helped to bring hip-hop and other emerging genres into the mainstream, thereby broadening the cultural landscape through more diverse representation of artists.

The MTV Video Music Awards (VMAs) have reached notable viewership milestones; for example, the 2010 VMAs hit an all-time high of 11.4 million TV viewers. However, VMA viewership has declined sharply in recent years, dropping to 1.93 million in 2019. More recent VMA broadcasts in 2025 reached 5.5 million viewers across CBS, MTV, and Paramount+.

The prevailing view among artists and viewers is one of nostalgia and concern regarding the reduced TV exposure afforded to music artists, despite the increasing dominance of digital platforms. Nevertheless, both fans and industry professionals acknowledge that music's role in cultural and artistic expression remains vital, albeit in digital spaces rather than on TV.