Live vs VOD vs Near-Live — Decision Card

One page. Three categories. The deadline-driven trade-offs and the protocol families that fit each.

VOD

Content exists before play

Latency:	not measured
Protocol:	HLS / DASH / CMAF
Buffer:	20-60 s
Cache hit:	~99%
Optimise:	cost, quality
Examples:	Netflix, YouTube, lecture archives

Failure mode:
egress bill, codec reach

Near-live

Live with deliberate delay

Latency:	5-90 s (deliberate)
Protocol:	HLS / DASH / CMAF
Buffer:	6-18 s
Cache hit:	~95%
Optimise:	predictable delay
Examples:	sports betting, live shopping, linear TV

Failure mode:
drift, moderator overload

Live

Every stage races a clock

Latency:	0.2-30 s (target)
Protocol:	LL-HLS / WebRTC / MoQ
Buffer:	0.05-6 s
Cache hit:	5-85%
Optimise:	latency, scale
Examples:	Twitch, sports, telemedicine, auctions

Failure mode:
stalls during peak moments

Three questions to pick a category

Q1. Does the content exist before the viewer presses play? **Yes -> VOD.** Otherwise continue to Q2.

Q2. Is sub-second interactivity required (bidding, conferencing, telemedicine)?
Yes -> Live, sub-second (WebRTC / MoQ). Otherwise continue to Q3.

Q3. Is a deliberate 5-90 s delay acceptable (betting, moderation, broadcast graphics)?
Yes -> Near-live (HLS / DASH / CMAF with 6-18 s buffer). Otherwise: **Standard / LL live (HLS, DASH, LL-HLS, LL-DASH).**

Rule of thumb

Tightening latency by 10x roughly doubles unit cost. Most 'we need low latency' requests are actually near-live in disguise. Pick the loosest deadline your product can live with — and design the architecture around it.

Primary standards (per Fora Soft Learn editorial source-hierarchy)

HLS: IETF RFC 8216 (Aug 2017). LL-HLS: Apple HLS Authoring Specification, rev 2025-09. DASH: ISO/IEC 23009-1:2022.
CMAF: ISO/IEC 23000-19:2024. WebRTC: W3C Candidate Recommendation + IETF RFC 8825-8866. QUIC: IETF RFC 9000 (May 2021).

Companion to: 'Live vs VOD vs Near-Live: Three Problems That Look the Same but Are Different'
www.forasoft.com/learn/video-streaming/articles/live-vs-vod-vs-near-live