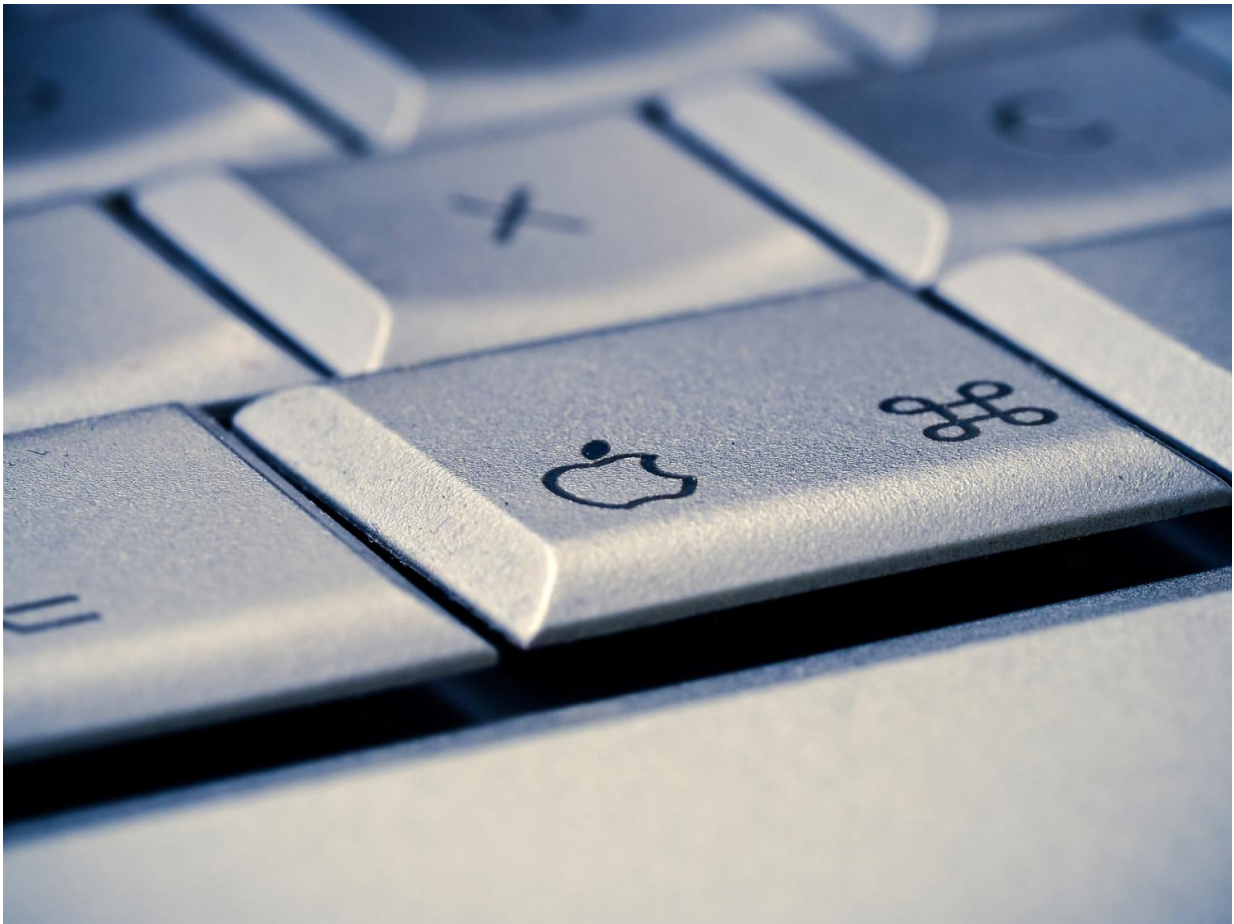


Apple TV Plus launching Friday with lowest price for major subscription service

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The company that brought you the Macintosh computer, iPhone, iPad

and iTunes now wants you to turn to it for Apple-branded entertainment.

And to get you to sign up for the new Apple TV Plus service, launching Nov. 1, Apple is basically giving away the store.

Buy a new Apple hardware product—starting with the \$199 iPod Touch, and continuing with the iPhone, iPad, Apple TV streaming box or Mac computer—and you get one year of service free. Historically, Apple sells more than 250 million of these devices a year, so this will clearly give Apple a massive head start in the "Streaming Wars," where it will compete with Netflix (150 million subscribers), Amazon Prime Video (more than 100 million subscribers) and Hulu (28 million subscribers.)

Apple's marketing bonus is why analyst Daniel Ives of Wedbush Securities predicts that Apple TV Plus will have more than 100 million subscribers within its first three years.

But can it keep them? Apple is launching Friday with only eight series, a documentary and a talk show, compared with the thousands of titles available on Netflix, Amazon Prime Video and Hulu.

"Apple needs a critical mass of programming, and eight shows is not a critical mass," says Peter Csathy, president of CREATV and an industry consultant. "I can't imagine the case for Apple TV will be a small number of original shows. There's got to be more in the coming months."

What you can watch

The Apple TV+ fare:

* "The Morning Show," backstage at a TV show in the #MeToo era, with Jennifer Aniston, Reese Witherspoon and Steve Carell.

* "See," a futuristic sci-fi show with Jason Momoa (Aquaman, Game of Thrones)

* "Dickinson," a dramatic series about poet Emily Dickinson, starring Hallee Steinfeld.

* "For all Mankind," a space alternate history drama about what would have happened had the space race never ended.

* Three children's shows: "Helpsters," from the creators of "Sesame Street," "Snoopy in Space," featuring the animated beagle, and a revival of the old PBS series "Ghostwriter."

* A documentary about elephants in Africa.

* The return of "Oprah's Book Club," featuring Oprah Winfrey interviewing authors and discussing books. Author and journalist Ta-Nehisi Coates is her first guest.

And waiting in the wings: "Servant" from director M. Night Shyamalan (Nov. 28), "Truth Be Told," with Octavia Spencer, Aaron Paul and Lizzy Caplan (Dec. 6), and several other series and movies that haven't been given airdates yet.

Apple will be bringing back Steven Spielberg's 1980s anthology series "Amazing Stories" and recently outbid HBO to get the third of Spielberg and actor/producer Tom Hanks' World War II projects, "Masters of the Air."

TV Plus was born out of shifting realities for Apple, which saw the iPhone gravy train peak and then start to slide in 2018, when unit sales began to dip for the first time. To keep investors satisfied and overall revenue higher than the year before, Apple shifted to a strategy of selling

"services." It focused on Apple Music, iCloud storage, Apple Care extended warranties and the like to make money off its existing and massive base of customers.

Services is now Apple's No. 2 division, bringing in more revenue than iPads, Mac computers or other hardware, but there's still a wide gap between iPhone revenue (\$26 billion in the most recent quarter) and \$11.4 billion for Services.

To take on Netflix and Disney, which is set to launch its own new service, Disney Plus, on Nov. 12, Apple opened up its checkbook. It hired two former executives from Sony Pictures and began bankrolling new series.

"It's not about whether Netflix wins and we lose, or if we win and they lose," CEO Tim Cook told the German publication Stern recently. "Many people use multiple services, and we are now trying to become one of them."

Apple is playing the Hollywood game. It has leased an entire building that's being erected in the heart of the trendy Culver City arts district as a base for its TV+ employees. That is just down the street from where Amazon's streaming operation is also based, at the vintage Culver Studios (home to such films as "Gone with the Wind" and "Citizen Kane"). Netflix's L.A. operations are based in classic Hollywood, the old Sunset/Gower studios, a former home for such series as "Saved by the Bell" and "Married...with Children."

Apple cut deals with stars like Aniston and Witherspoon, legendary director Spielberg, J.J. Abrams (who has several series in the works for Apple) and many others.

Apple, the master of staging million dollar live streams to sell new

hardware, recently staged its first red-carpet premiere for one of the TV+ shows, "For All Mankind," renting out the historic Regency Village theater (seen in the recent Quentin Tarantino film "Once upon a Time in Hollywood," when young Sharon Tate watches herself in a movie). Apple handed out mini-champagne bottles and glasses for guests to take to their seats, and handed out swag bags with freeze-dried ice cream.

With so few shows for your monthly subscription, Apple is taking a way different approach than Netflix and Amazon, which offer bulk for your subscription dollar.

Apple hasn't said whether it will offer its series on a "binge viewing" basis, as most shows on Netflix are presented.

Apple will have three episodes available of "The Morning Show" available for viewing, with new episodes dropping every Friday, while the series "Dickinson" will have all 10 episodes ready for viewing.

For now, Apple "doesn't have enough content to stand on their own," says Luke Bouma, editor of the CordCuttersNews blog. "But with the free year of access, that could buy Apple enough time to build a catalog of content to justify the price."

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