

Lack of polish, missing content mar AT&T's new cord-cutter service

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You already needed a scorecard to tell all the players in this convoluted streaming, cord-cutting era. Monday's nationwide launch of AT&T TV not only ushers in a new player, but it invites even more confusion.

Come to think of it, AT&T isn't exactly foreign to the TV landscape, given how U-verse and DirecTV are under its auspices, as well as the

HBO Max streaming service that's slated to arrive in May.

What then is AT&T TV, and as a cord cutter is this latest alternative to cable (or DirecTV) something to consider? Hint: I'm lukewarm after a few days of testing, mainly because of technical and navigational snags—and worse, missing content.

AT&T TV combines live TV with apps from Google Play

AT&T considers AT&T TV its new television flagship, the place where all the company's marketing muscle in the space will be applied going forward, though neither DirecTV nor U-verse are going away anytime soon.

The new service is a combination of live TV packages and streaming options, with subscribers gaining access to more than 5,000 apps in the Google Play Store, of which HBO Max will be one, along with Netflix and YouTube TV. You also get a cloud DVR with 500 hours of storage.

Part of the company pitch is you can switch between apps and live TV without switching inputs or grabbing a separate remote control.

The remote that comes with the thin box you connect to the TV is voice-activated, so that you can bark out commands to change channels, find a given program, turn on closed captioning or summon the Google Assistant. As on a smartphone, you might ask the Assistant for the weather, a stock price or to dim the household lights.

Google's Chromecast is also built in, which lets you cast content to the TV off your phone, tablet or computer.

AT&T TV pricing

First year standalone promotional AT&T TV packages start at \$49.99 per month, with a 24-month commitment. You can get it for \$39.99 in a bundle with speedy 1-gigabit fiber-based AT&T Internet service where available, or for the \$10 off discount if you otherwise get broadband or wireless from AT&T. As part of the bundle, AT&T fiber customers can get their internet for \$39.99 as well.

Monthly TV prices climb to \$93 on up in year two. And as is typical with cable, there are tiered packages that cost more for added channels—in year one and beyond.

Meanwhile each additional set-top box for watching TV in other rooms of the house costs an extra \$10 per month; you have the option to purchase a box outright for \$120, using it, for example, for Play Store apps, even if were you to eventually abandon AT&T TV.

AT&T TV subscribers can also watch content on their phones and tablets.

The hardware supports 4K, though at launch none of AT&T's live programs are available in 4K.

Missing content

You will still have to pay to subscribe to a Disney+,Netflix, YouTube TV, Showtime, HBO Max, and other premium services.

Alas, there's a major void in the streaming services that are available. Ahead of launch there's no Amazon Prime, Hulu, or Apple TV+, though AT&T says conversations with such content providers are ongoing.

Certain local or sports channels, depending where you live, may also be among the missing.

And yes, [football fans](#) will still need to subscribe to DirecTV for NFL Sunday Ticket, which AT&T TV will not have as part of its own packages.

Voice and other snags

Apart from pricing differences, there's no issue setting up AT&T TV with your own broadband provider, rather than AT&T's own internet service. I set up my demo AT&T box with broadband from Verizon Fios.

For the most part, that set up went smoothly: connecting an HDMI cable to the TV, choosing internet, and AT&T and Google account credentials to access Android TV capabilities and the Play Store.

But I encountered frustrating snags once I started watching TV, some with the voice remote. For example, when I asked aloud to "play the YES Network," the channel could not be found. Saying instead to just "play YES" did take me to there.

I similarly asked the remote to "play SNY" and again the channel could not be found. Never mind that SNY was listed in the program guide or that I could play it from there. By voice, I had to ask AT&T TV to "play SportsNet New York."

I pointed these issues out to AT&T and they were subsequently fixed.

At another point during my tests, I was able to record a show I watched live on CNN but for some reason couldn't do the same on an MSNBC program. That too seems to have been resolved.

I'm glad for the fixes but still feel like the DVR and overall navigation needs a slap of polish. It wasn't entirely clear, for instance, if I was committing to recording a single episode of a show or the entire series. And when I stopped recording one show then decided to record it again soon after, it wouldn't let me.

I did use the voice remote to start a Spotify playlist, which was nice. And yet I'd have liked to be able to keep listening to music while simultaneously eyeballing the program guide. But when I hit the Guide button on the remote to take me there, the music was silenced.

I'm sure AT&T will get around to filling in the key missing fare; the content deals to make this happen are a company priority, I'm told.

Until it does, however, and assuming services such as Amazon Primes and Hulu are near and dear to your viewing heart, I'd recommend taking a pass.

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