

New streaming app to 'Max' programming from HBO, Discovery

April 12 2023, by Michael Liedtke



Sarah Snook, from left, Alan Ruck, Brian Cox, Jeremy Strong and Kieran Culkin attend the premiere of HBO's "Succession" season four at Jazz at Lincoln Center on March 20, 2023, in New York. Warner Bros. Discovery unveiled a streaming service Wednesday, April 12, combining HBO programming with a mix of unscripted TV series in a push to reap more subscribers from what so far has been a muddled media merger. Credit: Photo by Charles Sykes/Invision/AP, File

Warner Bros. Discovery unveiled a streaming service Wednesday combining iconic HBO programming such as "The Sopranos" with a mix of unscripted TV series in a push to reap more subscribers from what so far has been a muddled media merger.

The \$16-per-month service, called Max, will be released May 23 in the U.S. and automatically replace the company's existing HBO Max service in what is being promised as a seamless transition. Max will gradually become available in the rest of the world, with Latin America next up on the slate.

The existing Discovery Plus app featuring reality and unscripted series such as "Fixer Upper" and "Naked and Afraid" from a collection of TV networks will continue to be offered. That's even as all that programming is made available within the new Max app, which will be marketed with the tagline "The One To Watch."

The transition comes a year after the completion of a roughly \$43 billion deal that spun off the AT&T's WarnerMedia Division that includes HBO, CNN and TBS into Discovery, whose stable includes the TLC, HGTV, Magnolia and Food networks.

When the deal was announced in 2021, Warner Bros. Discover CEO David Zaslav envisioned it creating "the best media company in the world" backed by a vast library of movies, TV series, documentaries and children's programming. The goal was to stand out among an array of streaming options competing for subscribers at a time many households are trimming discretionary spending amid stubbornly high inflation.

With Max now on the verge of rolling out, Zaslav said he still sees big things ahead.

"This is our rendezvous with destiny," he declared during a presentation

in the same studio where movies such as "Casablanca" and "A Streetcar Named Desire" were made. Those movies, as well as other Warner Bros. films, will be available in Max, which Zaslav hailed as "the streaming version of must-see TV." Zaslav hinted that live sports events and news will be added to Max before the end of the year.

Given that the Max app will bring more pedestrian programming from the Discovery networks alongside the boundary-breaking series that have been HBO's hallmark, Warner Bros. Discovery executives periodically emphasized HBO would remain the same groundbreaking network that recently caused a stir with the series "The Last of Us," and is currently making waves with the final season of "Succession."

Toward that end, the company said it would be announcing another offshoot of its most watched series, "Game of Thrones," and is developing a new live-action "Harry Potter" series featuring a different cast from the popular film franchise based on the books by J.K. Rowling.

Warner Bros. Discovery is hoping the Max app helps turn the tide after a year of turbulence.

Since taking over the combined company, Zaslav has been shedding thousands workers and slashing other expenses to cope with the roughly \$50 billion debt that the company took on largely because of the merger. The cost cutting included a decision to pull the plug on CNN's streaming service a month after its launch in a move that quickly raised doubts about whether the Warner Bros. Discovery deal would turn out to be a flop.

The ongoing skepticism has been reflected in New York-based Warner Bros. Discovery's stock price, which has dropped by more than 40% since the merger's completion, including further erosion Wednesday that

occurred after the company laid out its plans for the Max app.

Shares in Netflix, the world's top streaming services, have fallen by 7% during same stretch amid concerns about its own slowing growth, which included a loss of 920,000 subscribers in the U.S. and Canada territory in 2022 that represents its biggest market.

Netflix, which ended last year with 231 million worldwide subscribers, is just one of a bevy of deep-pocketed streamers that the new Max app will be competing against. Other notables include Apple, Amazon, and Walt Disney Co., which offers apps for Hulu TV and ESPN in addition to Disney Plus.

The stiff competition prompted Netflix to introduce a lower-cost streaming plan that includes ads, an option that Max will offer for \$10 per month for viewers willing to tolerate periodic commercial interruptions.

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Citation: New streaming app to 'Max' programming from HBO, Discovery (2023, April 12) retrieved 9 April 2024 from

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