

Review: No new Apple TV? Try Nvidia Shield instead

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With Apple expected to further delay an update to its already outdated Apple TV, consumers should take a look at Nvidia's new Shield device to get a sense of the future of streaming media players.

The Shield has many of the capabilities that are rumored to be in the works for Apple TV. But unlike the rumored Apple TV, the Shield was built to be a powerful game device as well. Better yet, the Shield is available today.

Until a few weeks ago, it was widely expected that Apple would debut a new version of Apple TV at its Worldwide Developer Conference in San Francisco. The company was also expected to unveil a new subscription video service that would offer a bundle of pay television channels over the Internet.

But the latest reports indicate that Apple is delaying both products. The company is reportedly still negotiating with the big cable networks to get them on its service, and is apparently still developing its new streaming-media device, according to multiple reports.

The delays could be a good thing, especially if Apple is able to use the extra time to adjust to the competition. It could do worse than to focus on the Shield.

Released late last month, the Shield is a streaming [media player](#) with a speedy processor that's built on the latest version of Google's Android TV software. That means that it has access to the Google Play app store and to Google Now.

Google Now is kind of like Apple's Siri. On smartphones, where Google Now first showed up, it can do things like tell you what the weather will be like tomorrow and warn you when you should leave for a meeting in order to make it on time.

Google Now can do those same things on the Shield and other Android TV devices. You simply call it up by pressing a button the Shield's [remote control](#) and talking into a microphone on it.

But Google Now has some other features that make it an ideal interface for a streaming media device. For example, you can use it to launch apps, instead of having to search through rows of app icons. Better yet, you can use it to look for things to watch. If you ask, "What movies has Jennifer Lawrence starred in?" or "Show me what movies were nominated for an Oscar in 2012," it will display a list.

Android TV also includes a universal search feature. If you search for "The Avengers," say, it will look for the movie not only in the Google Play store, but in apps such as CinemaNow and Plex as well.

The upcoming Apple TV is supposed to have many of these features. According to several reports, it will have one of Apple's A8 processors, the same chip that's in the latest iPhones. It's also supposed to have an app store, and Apple is expected to be opening up the device to apps written by outside programmers. Additionally, Apple is expected to build Siri into its interface.

But the Shield could one-up Apple TV in its ability to play games. Nvidia is shipping it with a game controller similar to the ones that come with Microsoft's Xbox One. For now, the company is also providing free access to its Grid game service for Shield users. That service allows users to stream some 50 console-quality games to the device, including popular titles like the "Batman: Arkham" series, "Lego Hobbit" and other Lego games, and "Saints Row 3."

And users can download games from the Google Play store, including casual titles like "Despicable Me: Minion Rush" and PC games like "Half-Life 2" and "Portal." The overall selection is still limited, but the

games that are available are high-quality and fun to play.

That's not the only advantage the Shield may have on Apple TV. The Shield supports 4K video, something the next Apple TV reportedly won't have. 4K is a new standard for ultra-high-definition video that makes pictures on extra-large-screen televisions look super sharp.

It's still early days for 4K, but the tech industry is betting it will be the next big thing in TVs. In the last year, ultra-high-definition televisions have become widely available and have started to fall to mainstream prices. Although 4K videos are still hard to find, Netflix is already streaming some movies and shows in UHD.

And the Shield has another big thing going for it over Apple TV: You can buy one today. By contrast, it's unclear when Apple will actually release its new streaming media device.

To be sure, the Shield isn't perfect. Its interface is clunky, for one thing. To get to any particular app on its home screen, you have to scroll through rows of icons that aren't ordered in any particular way. And there's no way to organize your apps into folders or categories.

And the universal search feature is anything but. It can only search certain apps for movies or shows. One of the most notable apps whose listings it can't yet access is Netflix, which seems like a huge oversight.

The Shield is also pricey. At \$200 for the base model, it costs nearly three times as much as the current version of Apple TV and significantly more than every other major [digital media player](#) on the market.

But it's a well-built machine with some cool features that make it a lot of fun. Apple would do well to take a closer look.

Troy's rating: 8.0 (out of 10)

What: Nvidia Shield [streaming media](#) player and game console

Likes: Able to play console-quality games, yet inexpensive for a game console; Google Now provides powerful voice search and control capabilities; access to Google Play store allows users to customize device with games and entertainment apps; universal search feature combs through multiple apps at once for videos, songs; supports 4K video.

Dislikes: Clunky interface; universal search doesn't comb Netflix's listings; number of available games is relatively small and most are older titles; pricey for a digital media player; remote control is a \$50 optional add-on.

Price: \$200 for version with 16GB of storage; \$300 for version with 500GB drive and free copy of "Borderlands: The Pre-Sequel."

Web: shield.[nvidia.com](#)

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