

Amazon streaming TV devices won't be so Amazon-focused

October 20 2016, by Anick Jesdanun



This Sept. 29, 2014, file photo, shows the Amazon Fire TV, a product for streaming popular video services, apps and games in high-definition, in Decatur, Ga. Amazon's Fire TV streaming devices will no longer emphasize video from its own store. Software updates coming in 2016 will give movies and TV shows from Netflix, HBO and other competitors equal prominence on the devices' home screen. The approach is similar to one Apple took when it refreshed its Apple TV device in 2015. (AP Photo/Ron Harris, File)

Amazon's own video store will no longer have the starring role on the company's Fire TV streaming devices.

Software updates coming this year will give movies and TV shows from Netflix, HBO and other competitors equal prominence on the devices' home screen. The approach is similar to one Apple took when it refreshed its Apple TV device last year.

Amazon's Fire TV has offered solid performance at reasonable prices, but its home screen has been cluttered with Amazon products—whether to rent or buy, or offered at no extra charge through Amazon's \$99-a-year Prime program. That's made it tough to find video from competing providers without turning to a voice-search feature that, until recently, excluded Netflix. For the most part, finding video typically required opening a service's app first.

Now, competing services will be offered space on the home screen. Netflix, for instance, could choose to highlight its original series "Stranger Things" alongside personalized recommendations. Netflix could also include a short video trailer that plays on the home screen.

And while Amazon has long had a watch list for viewers to keep track of what they want to watch, choosing a title has directed the viewer back to Amazon's store. Now, Amazon will offer viewers a choice of providers. If a video is available for free through Netflix, for instance, that will be the most prominent option, even if Amazon's own store is selling the same title.

The development comes as leading video services make major investments in original shows, making it difficult for any single service to fulfill all of a viewer's needs. An Amazon-centric approach penalizes viewers looking for not just Amazon's "Transparent" but also Netflix's "Luke Cage" and Hulu's "The Mindy Project."

The refreshed Fire TV Stick, which begins shipping Thursday for \$40, will get the free software update first, followed by the standard \$100

Fire TV device released last year. Both will get the updates by the end of the year. Amazon says older devices will get the updates, too, but no timetable was given.

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Citation: Amazon streaming TV devices won't be so Amazon-focused (2016, October 20)
retrieved 6 May 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2016-10-amazon-streaming-tv-devices-wont.html>

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