

AT&T's confusing mess of online TV services even has AT&T confused

Enlarge / An AT&T store in Chicago.

reader comments

68 with 57 posters participating, including story author

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AT&T recently made the baffling decision to offer two separate streaming TV services with nearly identical names and to deliver those two distinct services through one app.

This obviously had the potential to confuse consumers, as we wrote in our coverage in July. But it has turned out even worse than we expected, because AT&T itself has been calling one of the services by the wrong name in its communications with customers.

To recap, AT&T eliminated its DirecTV Now brand name and renamed that service "AT&T TV Now." AT&T also rolled out a completely new service and called it "AT&T TV," the same name without "Now." These two services, with different channel and pricing schemes, are offered through the same app called "AT&T TV."

While that is confusing, you'd think AT&T itself would be able to keep track of the names of its own streaming services. But that isn't the case, as AT&T is incorrectly telling customers that the old DirecTV Now service is now called "AT&T TV."

“The DirecTV Now you know is getting a new name. Say hello to AT&T TV,” AT&T says in its app page on both Google Play for Android and Apple’s App Store for iPhone, iPad, and Apple TV. “We’ve rebranded DirecTV Now to AT&T TV,” the app description also says.

- Screenshot from the AT&T TV app page in Apple’s App Store.
- Release notes from the AT&T TV app page in Apple’s App Store.

But that isn’t accurate, and there are important differences between the service formerly known as DirecTV Now and AT&T TV. AT&T TV Now is available nationwide just like DirecTV Now was, while AT&T TV is only available in 10 cities so far.

AT&T TV is more similar to traditional cable or satellite TV than AT&T TV Now. AT&T TV has two-year contracts, prices that rise automatically after a year, fees for activation and early termination of service, a Regional Sports Fee, and “certain other additional fees and charges.” Both services offer a linear set of TV channels over the Internet, but AT&T TV Now has simpler pricing and no contracts.

AT&T’s confusion went beyond mobile app

AT&T’s naming problem goes beyond app store descriptions, as Cord Cutters News reported a few days ago:

To make matters even worse, most tech support for AT&T TV Now is labeled AT&T TV on AT&T’s website. When you try to contact AT&T TV Now you need to use the contact information for AT&T TV. This has resulted in many of our readers confused about how they contact... AT&T TV Now to ask a question.

AT&T’s website does not help. AT&T TV Now is only found if

you click on streaming. For a while after the name change, clicking on DirecTV Now in some menus on AT&T's website brought you to AT&T TV [instead of] AT&T TV Now.

Even just this week when AT&T announced a deal with Starz they didn't list AT&T TV Now but listed AT&T TV. When asked about this AT&T said AT&T TV Now was lumped together with AT&T TV.

When contacted by Ars, AT&T noted that “both AT&T TV and AT&T TV Now customers use the same mobile app,” and said it will fix its mistake. “We are updating this description to ensure this is more clear for customers going forward,” AT&T said.

The mistake of calling AT&T TV Now “AT&T TV” was introduced in the app with an update on August 22 and has remained incorrect since then, according to the app version history on the Apple App Store. AT&T had used the correct name for AT&T TV Now in a previous version of the app released on August 19.

AT&T made the naming changes after big subscriber losses. AT&T lost 946,000 TV subscribers in Q2 2019 after announcing a series of price increases. Including DirecTV satellite, U-verse TV, and streaming TV plans, AT&T's total number of video subscribers dropped from 25.4 million in Q2 2018 to 22.9 million in Q2 2019.

Besides AT&T TV and AT&T TV Now, AT&T also offers TV shows through HBO Go, HBO Now, AT&T WatchTV, AT&T U-verse, DirecTV, and plans a new HBO Max service.

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