Five big questions about Apple putting iTunes on Samsung TVs

Apple’s decision to put iTunes movie and TV rentals on Samsung smart TVs is a huge strategy shift for the company: instead of building services to make its own devices like the HomePod and Apple TV more valuable, the company is allowing those services to be accessed on competing devices. Fundamentally, this all makes sense, since Apple is increasingly focused on services revenue, and it’s been making huge investments in TV content ahead of a long-planned streaming service launch. Whatever Apple TV service comes to fruition will need a lot of scale to succeed, and that means putting apps on platforms other than the Apple TV. Sure.

But the devil’s in the details, and there are lots of unanswered questions about this iTunes deal. Here are my top 5:

1. Is Apple going to allow Samsung’s smart TV tracking to snoop on iTunes viewers? Smart TVs are notorious for tracking what people watch, but Apple’s entire brand is privacy. What usage data will Samsung see from the iTunes app?
2. Samsung smart TVs run Tizen, Samsung’s wacky custom operating system. Is Apple building a Tizen iTunes app? Is there a Tizen team inside Apple? Or is Samsung building this app? Who will be in charge of updating it and fixing bugs? Smart TV apps are not known for being updated well or very often.
3. Why would any Samsung smart TV owner buy an Apple TV box

now? Virtually every other major streaming app is on the Samsung platform. The Apple TV is already lagging in sales compared to much cheaper rivals like Roku and Amazon Fire TV; it's not like they'll sell more when the entire market of Samsung TV owners doesn't need one anymore.

4. Apple made a lot of noise about supporting the Dolby Vision HDR standard when it launched the Apple TV 4K, with a fallback to the less-good HDR10. But Samsung TVs don't support Dolby Vision — Samsung is pushing HDR10+, which no streaming service apart from Amazon supports right now. Is Apple remastering its iTunes library in HDR10+?
5. Why didn't Apple just build a TV that runs its software? It's not that hard; Roku and Amazon have both managed to do it cheaply and extremely well with partners. And in an age of flat iPhone sales, a killer new hardware line would be pretty exciting.
6. Okay, a bonus question: why on earth is this still called iTunes? Are all these apps going to get rebranded when the TV service launches? Apple's branding game has been real fuzzy lately.

I suspect we'll learn the answers to all of these questions soon — we've reached out to both Apple and Samsung for comment, and sooner or later *Apple's going to ship a Tizen app* that we can just look at and use. But for now, it's fascinating to watch Apple bring its services to even more rival platforms.

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