The Problem with Jon Stewart cancellation highlights a problem for Apple’s content



Enlarge / Jon Stewart on his Apple TV show.

reader comments

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Jon Stewart and his weekly talk show *The Problem with Jon Stewart* are out at Apple, according to reports from The New York Times and Variety. Apple canceled the show just weeks before its third season began taping. Its cancellation sheds some light on the conflict of priorities Apple faces as it leans more into content rather than just selling tools, platforms, and gadgets.

The New York Times article cites “several people with knowledge of the situation,” saying that staffers working on

the show were told at the end of the day Thursday that it would not move forward.

The reason for the shift? Stewart and Apple executives “had disagreements over some of the topics and guests,” the sources said. Specifically, they claimed Stewart told staffers that Apple execs took issue with planned programming related to both China and artificial intelligence, and noted that with the 2024 US election coming up, there might have been additional opportunities for disagreement then.

Apple does much of its business (both in production and sales) in China and has invested heavily in the country’s infrastructure. Regarding China, Apple execs may have been worried that Stewart’s planned commentary could alienate customers or partners in the country.

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As for AI, Apple has increasingly focused on AI for software features on the iPhone. Primarily, it uses machine learning to drive things like search suggestions, photography, and palm detection. There have also been rumors that Apple plans to get into ChatGPT-like large language models, which have been more controversial.

We’re just engaging in informed speculation about the specific reasoning, though; Apple declined to comment on the NYT story.

The show’s cancellation is indicative of the kinds of challenges owners of platforms (like Apple, Amazon, Google, and others) face when they are producing content, too. Apple TV+, the iPhone, and other Apple products are used by a wide range of people, and investing in content that may be contentious for key customers or partners could create big problems for the company’s overall business.

It’s also part of a larger pattern of streaming services struggling with the talk show format. There have been numerous attempts, but most (talk shows like Netflix’s *Norm Macdonald*

has a Show) have not been hugely successful—in part because the business model of streaming TV is as much about the long-term value of content as it is about timeliness, and talk shows tend to focus on topics du jour.

The Problem with Jon Stewart was Stewart's first return to hosting a TV show since his much-praised and widely watched tenure on *The Daily Show* ended in 2015. Stewart has not yet announced any future television plans.

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