

WarnerMedia Axes HBO Go and HBO Now After Bumpy Launch of HBO Max

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Key insights:

- For nearly a year, AT&T and WarnerMedia execs had maintained that consumers would be able to navigate their multiple HBO brands.

Say goodbye to HBO Go and HBO Now—and at least some of your confusion around which one was which.

Following the rocky debut of flagship streamer HBO Max, WarnerMedia is attempting to clear up the brand confusion around the various HBO iterations—HBO, HBO Go, HBO Max and HBO Now—by retiring the HBO Go and HBO Now streaming apps, the company said today.

HBO Go, the streaming app that was available for HBO cable subscribers who logged in using their television provider information, will be pulled from most primary platforms beginning July 31. Meanwhile, HBO Now, the company's direct-to-consumer streaming service, will be rebranded to a stand-alone HBO app. Existing HBO Now subscribers will still be able to access HBO programming through the rebranded app as well as through play.hbo.com.

The move comes less than three weeks after the premiere of HBO Max, a new streaming service from WarnerMedia that contains all of HBO's programming plus a deep library of shows and movies, as well as a modest lineup of original

programming. It costs the same as a subscription to HBO in most instances, but its debut was marred by brand confusion and questions about where and how customers could get it—or if they could get it at all.

“Now that HBO Max has launched and is widely distributed, we will be sunsetting the HBO GO app, as well as rebranding the HBO NOW app to HBO,” a spokesperson said in a statement. “Implementing these changes allows us to further strengthen HBO Max as the primary platform for accessing not only the robust offering of HBO but also a vast WarnerMedia library of acquired content and originals, while also simplifying our consumer offering in the market.”

That move toward simplification now means HBO Max will serve as the central streamer for AT&T-owned WarnerMedia, while HBO will serve as the option for people who have declined to upgrade their HBO subscriptions to HBO Max, which costs the same, or are ineligible to get it due to ongoing carriage disputes. Some HBO subscribers who pay through Amazon Fire TV devices or through Roku connected TV devices are still unable to upgrade to HBO Max for free, another headache for consumers trying to find their way into the new streaming service.

“Consumers don’t do well with confusion,” Dan Rayburn, a principal analyst at Frost & Sullivan and evp of website and conference producer StreamingMedia.com, recently told Adweek. “Consumers pick services that are easy to use and that they can understand.”

AT&T and WarnerMedia execs have been fielding questions about potential brand confusion ever since they settled on the HBO Max name last July but had maintained that consumers would be able to navigate the similarly named brands. Today’s announcement is an admission that the multiple HBO brands had hindered HBO Max since the service rolled out last month.

HBO Max is WarnerMedia’s biggest bet yet in the streaming

wars and is aimed at helping the company stand out with an all-in-one offering for subscribers who are streaming more but are facing unprecedented economic headwinds.

It's just one of a number of flashy new services that have come onto the scene in recent years, and more are coming: NBCUniversal is preparing to unveil its own streamer, Peacock, in mid-July, while ViacomCBS' streamer CBS All Access is working on a rebrand and overhaul of the service for this summer.

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