

Apple TV (4th Generation) Streaming Media Player Reviewed

By: [Adrienne Maxwell](#), April 4, 2016

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Performance

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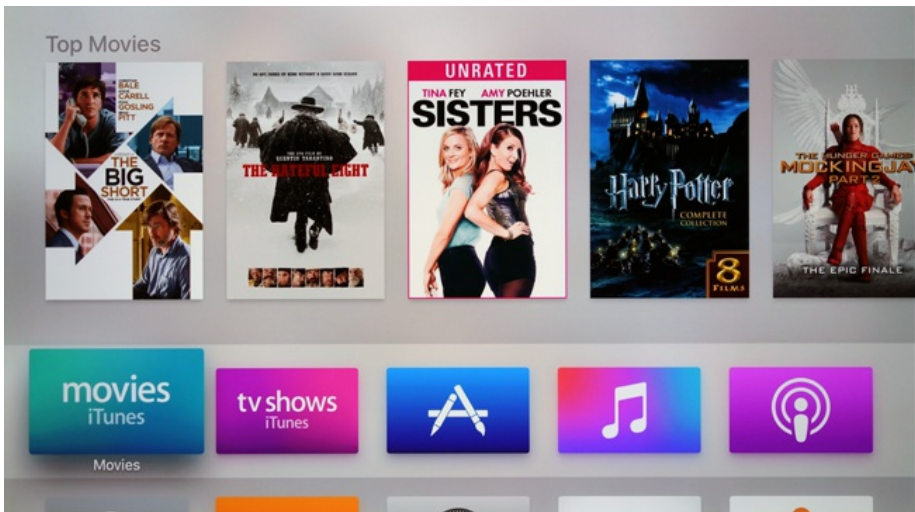
Overall

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Performance

Let's begin the performance evaluation by discussing the new interface, whose basic layout really isn't that different in form or function from the previous interface. The Home page still features content options running along the top. Below that is a row of categories: Movies, TV Shows, Apps (new), Photos, and Music. Finally, below that are all of the available apps, arranged in rows of five. The background is now white instead of black, and the content recommendations along the top of the screen are a little larger in size.



In previous [Apple TV](#) models, the Home page was locked with no ability to customize it. Apple dictated exactly which apps to offer and how they were organized down the page. In the new model, the Home page is mostly void of apps when you begin. It's your job to go into the new App Store and decide which apps you want. When you add/purchase new apps, they will appear on the Home page in the order you added them; however, you now have the ability to move apps around on the page to organize them as you see fit, and a recent firmware update added the ability to organize apps in folders just like you can in iOS.

Clicking into the Movies or TV Shows category takes



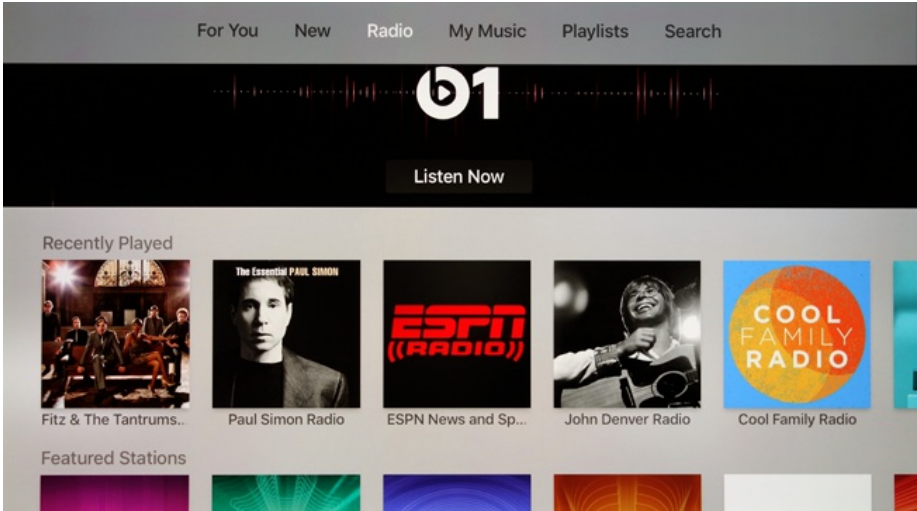
Home Theater News

- Denon Announces Two New S Series AV Receivers
- Roku Debuts New Streaming Stick
- Google Working on Device to Compete with Amazon Echo, Reports Say
- TV Everywhere Usage Grows
- Foxconn to Purchase Majority Stake in Sharp
- Classe Audio Announces Sigma 2200i Integrated Amp
- Sony to Launch ULTRA 4K Streaming Service in April
- Onkyo Adds Three New AV Receivers to RZ Series
- Redbox to Revisit the Streaming Category with New VOD Service
- Netflix Admits to Throttling Service to AT&T/Verizon Customers



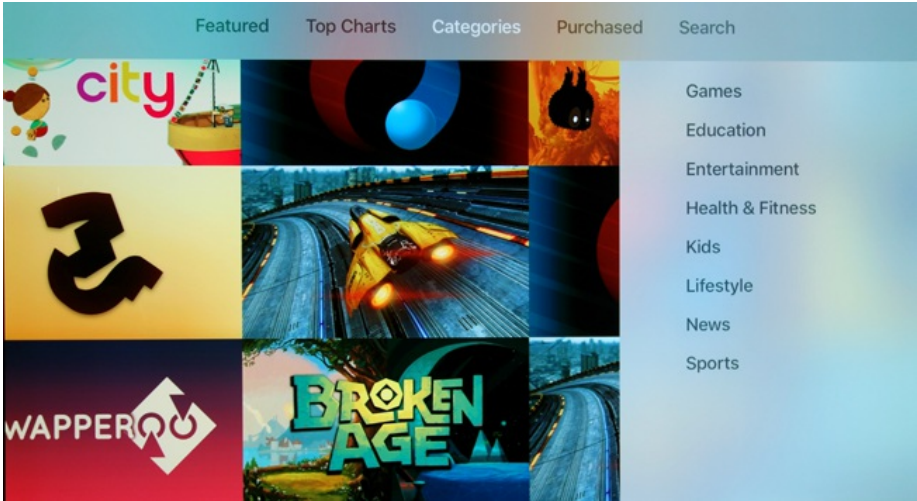
you into the [iTunes](#) Store, where all content is per-per-use--meaning that you rent or purchase individual film titles or TV episodes. The Movies category page is divided into sub-categories similar to what you see in the iTunes Store via your computer: Top Movies, New and Noteworthy, 2016 Oscar Winners, Notable Indies, etc. The same is true for TV Shows.

The Photos category page will show you all of the photos that you've stored in iCloud, while the Music page (which, in previous [Apple TV](#) players, just took you to the [iTunes](#) music store) now shows you all of the music you've purchased directly through iTunes, as well as other music that you've chosen to store in iCloud. Plus, if you're an [Apple Music subscriber](#), you can access all of those features here: radio channels, For You recommendations, and the ability to search the entire Apple Music catalog via text or Siri voice search. If you're not an Apple Music subscriber, you're given the option to sign up for a free trial the first time you launch the Music category page.



As with the previous players, you can also link the [Apple TV](#) to computers on your home network that are running [iTunes](#) in order to access your personal music, movie, TV, and photo collections over AirPlay. The Computers category page is where you'll find this content. Another category that comes preloaded on the [Apple TV](#) is Podcasts, where you can access your existing podcasts and easily browse/add new ones. You can also stream content from your iOS device via AirPlay.

Of course, the first major change to the new [Apple TV](#) is the addition of the Apps Store, so let's talk about what you'll find there. The Apps home page is divided into five categories: Featured, Top Charts, Categories, Purchased, and Search. Apple does offer a number of marquee apps, including [Netflix](#), [Hulu](#), HBO Now/Go, Showtime, YouTube, Pandora, and lots of TV Everywhere apps (Watch ABC, Watch ESPN, various Disney channels, CBS, NBC, Fox Now, Nick, MTV, Comedy Central, and many more). The major sports apps are also onboard, like NBA, NHL, NFL, MLS, and MLB.tv. [YouTube disappeared from my third-generation Apple TV last year](#) due to an API update, but it is available again on the new 4th-gen player.



However, there are also a lot of big names missing from the Apps page--such as VUDU, [Amazon](#) Video, M-



GO, Google Play, Spotify, iHeartRadio, TuneIn, and Sling TV (Apple has been trying to assemble its own competing TV service, after all).

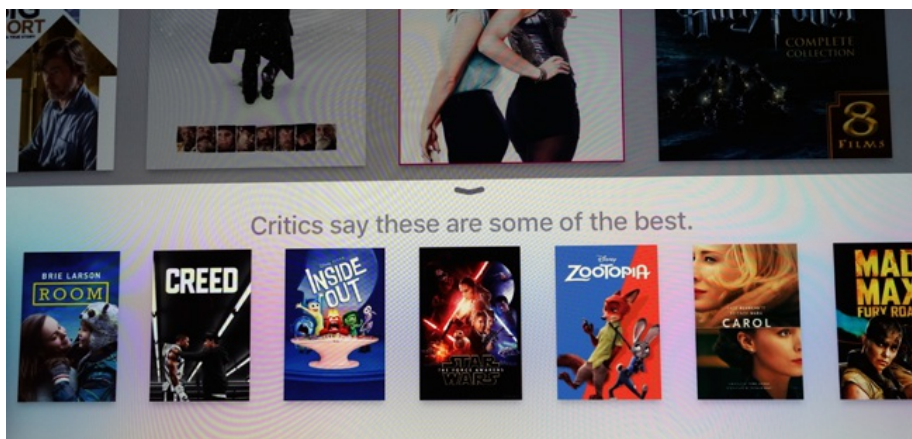
To stream personal media content outside of the AirPlay ecosystem, the App Store offers PLEX, VLC for Mobile, and a variety of DLNA apps, but there's no USB input to directly connect a [USB flash drive](#) or server. *[Editor's note: The original version of this story said there was no PLEX app.]*

Gaming apps are a new feature for Apple TV, and you'll find an assortment of games ranging from basic, free family-friendly games that work with the supplied remote to more advanced games that must be purchased and can be used with an optional third-party controller. We're not a gaming-oriented publication, so I'll leave the more in-depth gaming performance evaluation to other sites that cover such topics. As a novice who really only plays the simple family-friendly games, I can say that the App Store does include some common options like Crossy Road, Pac-Man 256, [Angry Birds Go!](#), and Minion Rush that I've also played on the [Amazon Fire TV](#). Functionality and performance were pretty much the same. The remote's touchpad ability can be a little more intuitive than basic button pushes in certain games.

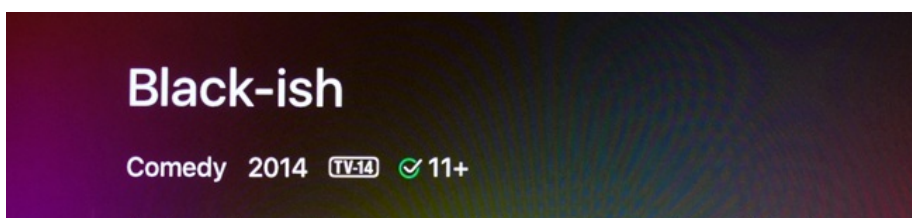
In terms of app performance, I found that most apps launched within about five seconds, and most apps stay open during a particular viewing session so that you can return to them instantly. Overall system performance was perhaps a tad bit slower than that of the new [Roku 4](#) and Amazon Fire TV players, but it was faster than that of my third-gen Apple TV. Playback was reliable, and I did not encounter any issues with freezing, stuttering, or system crashes.

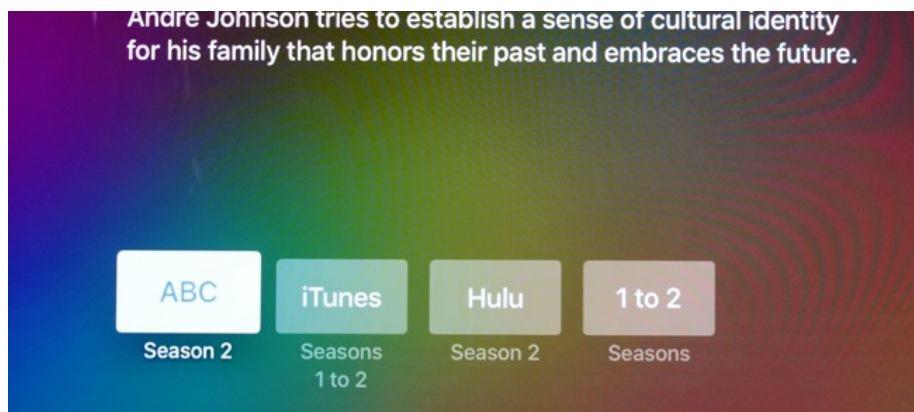
The new remote improves the user experience, as well. The touchpad slider allows for much faster menu navigation than the old button-only remote, and the addition of a dedicated Home button means you don't have to do the press-and-hold thing with the Menu button anymore. Menu still allows you to move through levels, while Home takes you back to the Home page. Double-clicking the Home button puts the screen in multi-task mode, where you can swipe through different apps and pages (just like with iOS).

A major addition to the remote, and to the platform in general, is Siri voice search. The older Apple TV model doesn't include any search function, text or otherwise. With [Siri voice control](#), you can search for content by movie/show name, actor, or director. You can say "Show me popular movies" and get a list of the hottest new releases in the [iTunes Store](#). You can search by film genre and then tailor the search even further by adding, "Only the good ones."



Apple's content search does have some cross-platform support. Apple has deals with [Netflix](#), [Hulu](#), HBO, and ABC/Disney; so, when you search for titles, those apps may appear alongside iTunes in your results. For instance, if I say, "Show me episodes of Black-ish," I get results for the ABC, iTunes, and Hulu apps. A search for "House of Cards" brings up results for Netflix and [iTunes](#). Since Apple doesn't offer as many competing movie-streaming services, this cross-platform search works better with TV content--at least movies available in Netflix will show up in your results, though.





On the music side, Apple Music subscribers--I repeat, you must be an Apple Music subscriber--can use Siri to launch playback of a certain song, artist, album, or genre, either from your iCloud music collection or through Apple Music's catalog. You can ask Siri to create a radio station based on an artist. You can ask it to skip a song or to play the top songs in a certain genre like pop or rock.

Like [Amazon](#) and its new Alexa search, Siri search is designed give you more than just content results. You can ask for weather, stock, or sports updates, for instance. If I asked, "What's the NBA schedule?" I got a list of all games being played that day and what time they start. You can also use Siri to launch apps without having to navigate to the Home page. Here's a good link that shows you [all the different types of questions you can ask Siri](#).

All in all, I found Siri voice search to work very well and to be a very helpful tool. It's a little more open than Amazon's voice search in terms of content results, and it was able to perform more advanced searches than Alexa. I like that the search results usually pop up unobtrusively at the bottom of the screen, with minimal interruption to the content you're playing--as opposed to Alexa, which pauses playback and puts up a full-screen search result.

The Downside

From a technology standpoint, the fourth-gen Apple TV simply lags behind its competitors. As I've already said, it lacks 4K support and 24p output on the video side, and it also lacks DTS support on the [audio side](#).

Apple only recently opened up the tvOS API for developers to create Apple TV apps, so it's no surprise that the Apple TV Apps store doesn't yet compete with the [Roku](#), Amazon, and Android-based NVIDIA players in its content offerings, in either entertainment apps or games. The number of apps will surely grow and probably grow quickly. But the big question is, will we see apps from competitors like Spotify, iHeartRadio, [Amazon](#) Video, Google Play, M-GO, and VUDU? Is Apple discouraging these apps because they compete with the company's own services, or are the competitors shying away for the same reason? Amazon may not have an iTunes app, but at least it offers AirPlay apps in its store so that you can stream your Apple content.

You should avoid using the onscreen virtual [keyboard](#) whenever possible--it's just awful. The entire alphabet is in one long, straight line across the screen, and you can't even cut across the screen after "z" to jump back to "a" on the other side. You have to go back and forth, and it's a huge pain. Thankfully, a recent firmware update added the ability to use the Siri remote to speak text into the Search/Keyboard window, which makes it easier to sign in to apps and input other text. You can also input text via the Remote app's [keyboard](#).

Like [Amazon](#) did with its new [Fire TV](#), Apple has omitted the optical digital audio output, which prevents the device's compatibility with non-HDMI AV receivers, soundbars, and other audio playback devices (Roku, in contrast, added an optical digital audio output to its Roku 4). At least with this player, if your soundbar or powered speaker supports Bluetooth or AirPlay, you can output the [audio signal](#) that way.

Comparison & Competition

I pretty much named the primary competitors to the new Apple TV throughout the review. The [Roku 4](#) carries an asking price of \$129.99, while [Amazon's second-gen Fire TV](#) costs \$99.99. Both are 4K-capable, include voice search, and offer gaming applications (Amazon's gaming controller is also an optional accessory), and both cost less than the new Apple TV. The [NVIDIA Shield](#) is another 4K-capable box, built on Android TV, with voice search and a strong gaming emphasis; it comes standard with a gaming controller, not an HT-style remote. The Shield's price is a higher \$199.99 for the 16GB version and \$299.99 for the 500GB version.