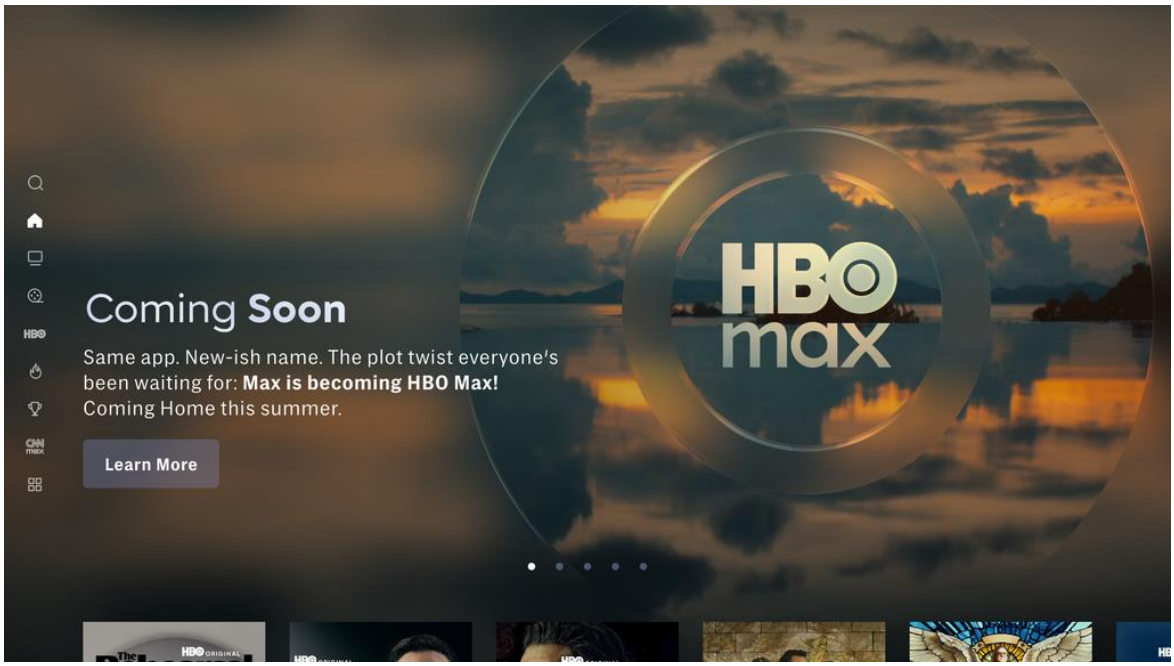
The New York Times

Max, Once Known as HBO Max, Is Calling Itself HBO Max Again. Got It?

Warner Bros. Discovery executives are reinstating the name HBO Max for the popular streaming service. It's the fourth name change for the app in the last decade.



HBO, a trailblazer of the cable era, has been on a very bumpy ride finding an identity in the streaming era.Credit...Warner Bros. Discovery

By John Koblin May 14, 2025

It's not Max. It's HBO Max — again.

In a surprise pivot, Warner Bros. Discovery executives announced Wednesday morning that the streaming service Max would be renamed HBO Max, reinstating the app's old name and abandoning a contentious change that the company introduced two years ago.

The reason for the change, executives explained, is straightforward.

People who subscribe and pay $17 a month for the streaming service wind up watching HBO content like "The White Lotus" and "The Last of Us," as well as new movies, documentaries and not a whole lot more.

"It really is a reaction to being in the marketplace for two years, evaluating what's working and really leaning into that," Casey Bloys, the chairman of HBO content, said in an interview.

HBO, a trailblazer of the cable era, has been on a very bumpy ride to finding an identity in the streaming era. There was HBO Go (2008), HBO Now (2015), HBO Max (2020), Max (2023) and now, once again, HBO Max (2025).

Two years ago, Warner Bros. Discovery executives said that they meant well by changing the name to Max. Their overwhelming concern, the executives said, was that Discovery's suite of reality shows — "Sister Wives," "My Feet Are Killing Me" — risked watering down the HBO brand, which continued to produce award-winning series like "Succession."

Further, they said, HBO spent decades branding itself as a premium adult service. That was not exactly an ideal anchor for a streaming service that they envisioned would compete head to head with a general entertainment app like Netflix.

Instead, the name change to Max mostly seemed to cause widespread confusion, both within the entertainment industry and generally among consumers. Was HBO dead? Was it being marginalized? What gives?

In the last few years in the so-called streaming wars, Netflix has taken a runaway lead over old-guard entertainment brands, drawing roughly 8 percent of all television time in March, according to Nielsen. Warner Bros. Discovery drew 1.5 percent, a little more than Peacock but below Disney's streaming services, Amazon Prime Video, Paramount, Roku and Tubi, Nielsen said.

Executives have conceded in recent months that competing with an everything-for-everybody app like Netflix, which has more than 300 million subscribers, was not realistic. Instead, they would be perfectly happy to be a complementary service.

"We started listening to consumers saying, 'Hey, we don't really want more content, we want something that is different, we want to end the death scroll with something that is better,'" JB Perrette, the president of streaming for Warner Bros. Discovery, said in an interview.

Warner Bros. Discovery executives also discovered over the last two years that much of Discovery's content was not being watched. Original programs tended to do the best on the service, as did new Warner Bros. movies, licensed A24 films and documentaries. Some Discovery content, particularly from its ID cable network, did well, but everything else — food, lifestyle and other reality series from Discovery — went relatively untouched. (Discovery+ remains available as a stand-alone streaming option.)

Max has seen encouraging results in recent months. The streaming division at Warner Bros. Discovery is now profitable, and its subscriber count jumped another five million in the first three months of the year, bringing its total number of subscribers to over 122 million. The app recently rolled out to Australia and France, and next year it will be introduced to Britain, Germany and Italy.

There have also been hints of a bigger change. Just a few weeks ago, Max changed its color scheme back to the old-school HBO's black and white, leaving behind the blue palette that the company introduced in 2023 with the brand pivot.

Mr. Bloys said that the transition to streaming has been tricky for many cable companies. HBO “and a bunch of other companies are trying to navigate that,” he said.

“That said,” he continued, “I do hope this is the last time we have a conversation about the naming of the service.”