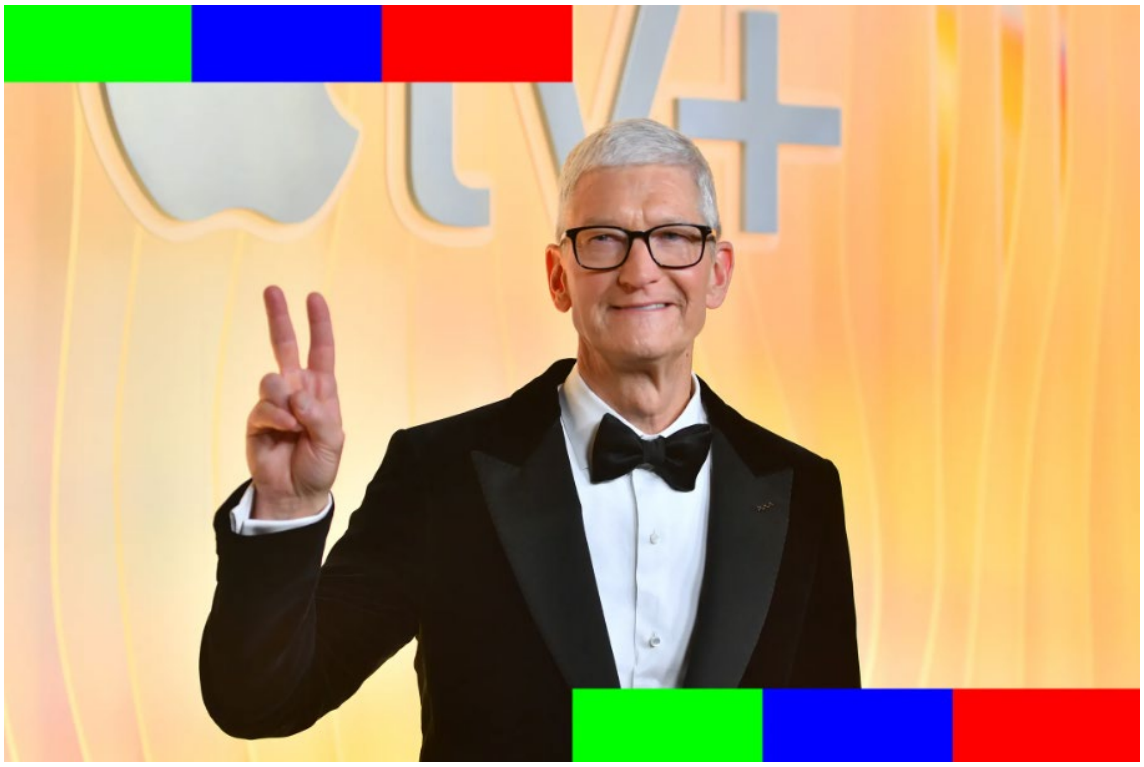
VULTURE
BUFFERING

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SUM THOUGHTS

Apple, Nonplussed



Apple's move this week to rebrand its subscription streaming service as simply Apple TV — RIP "+" — was poorly communicated, potentially confusing, and, to be honest, just really weird. Rather than revealing this bit of news at one of the company's splashy product events, in a press release, or through a carefully orchestrated media leak, the tech giant simply tossed it out there as an afterthought in some boilerplate at the end of a Monday-morning press release about the Apple TV+ (sorry, Apple TV) premiere date for F1 The Movie. It was so low-key that some of the industry trades that covered the date announcement for F1 didn't even notice it at first.

Instead, Apple-centric blogs like MacRumors took note of the slightly tweaked wording at the bottom of the F1 release, and also caught wind of the fact that a new beta version of the Apple TV operating system seeded at roughly the same time as the F1 news incorporated the new, nonplussed logo.

Pretty quickly, word spread on social media that Apple TV+ was now Apple TV, and, just like that, the company's rebranding of its signature streaming platform was complete. Like I said, weird.

But however bizarrely things played out, here's the important thing to keep in mind about this surprise rebranding: It really doesn't matter. Yes, the whole thing is confusing for folks (like me) who think too much about the particulars of the streaming business. Apple now has at least three products that use the exact same name: Its physical streaming box; its platform for navigating third-party streamers like Netflix and Hulu and for digitally purchasing movies and TV shows; and, yes, the $12.99-per-month service that gives you access to Ted Lasso and The Morning Show. So because the plus sign is no more, F1 The Movie is both available now on Apple TV (the digital video store) and yet also coming soon to Apple TV (the subscription streaming service).

Yet the average consumer has long thought of Apple TV+ as simply Apple TV or even Apple, in the same way most folks don't distinguish between Amazon Prime Video (the free video store anyone can use to buy seasons of Friends), Amazon Prime (the two-day delivery subscription service), and Prime Video (the streaming service that makes The Boys and The Summer I Turned Pretty and can be accessed via Amazon Prime or through a stand-alone subscription). Apple isn't saying on the record why it made this change, but I'm guessing the company known for keeping things streamlined and simple just finally decided that the plus sign had outgrown its usefulness, like a vestigial limb.

Apple TV has done a really good job carving out a brand identity for itself. It's a destination for high-end, premium-budget original shows and movies from big-name filmmakers and stars. And unlike every other big streamer, Apple TV doesn't have a big library of licensed fare to wade through, making it easier for originals to stand out on the platform, with or without a mathematical symbol attached. So while I truly don't get why it had to be so low-key about this change, Apple's gonna Apple. I'm guessing it simply didn't think this rebranding was worth making a fuss about.

Still, I do wonder whether there's more to the Apple TV+ brand refresh still to come. Sites like Mac Rumors have been predicting a revamped Apple TV box will hit store shelves very soon. Is it possible this updated box will get a name that's not simply "Apple TV"? Similarly, Apple TV is the only major streamer without an advertising-supported tier, leading to tons of speculation that it may eventually give in and let people pay less in exchange for putting up with some commercials. If that's the case, perhaps Apple TV will feel the need to label its ad-free tier something like "Apple TV Premium" or maybe even … Apple TV+. It wouldn't be the first time a streaming service revived an old identity.