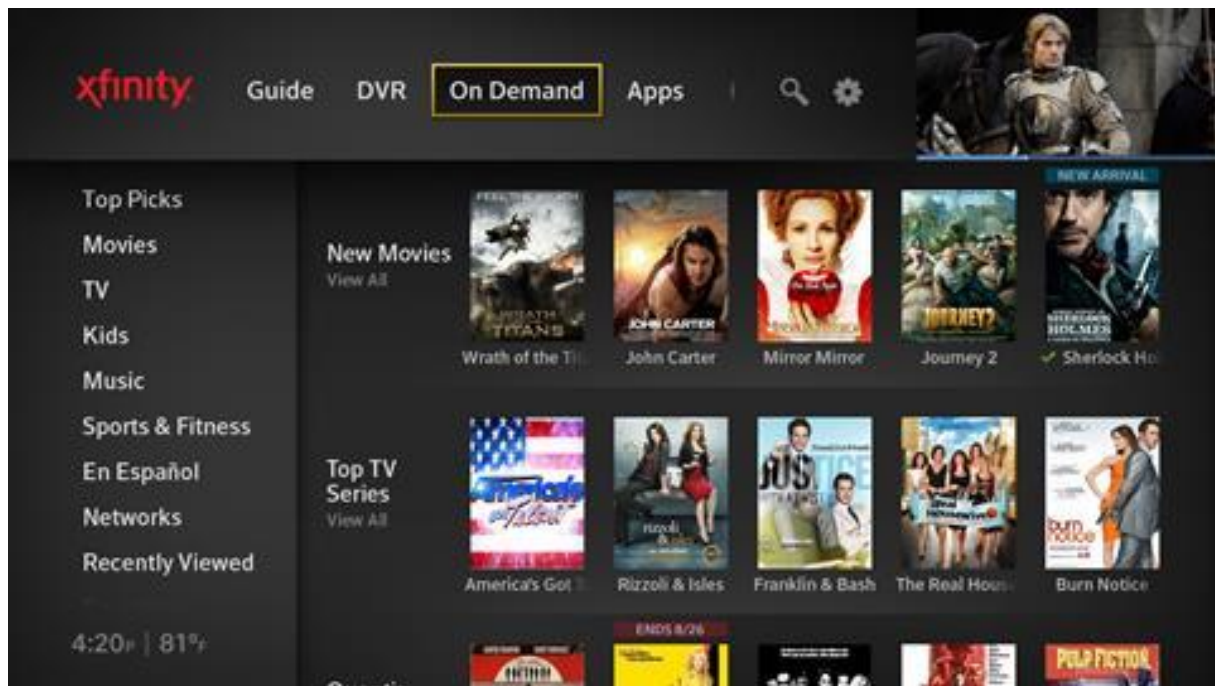


# Home entertainment devices: A watching brief

By [Anne Morris](#) 26 July 2022

Home entertainment services received a huge boost during the COVID-19 pandemic, providing a welcome distraction to those forced to stay at home for weeks and sometimes months at a time.

Many may have decided that this was also the time to upgrade home entertainment equipment, perhaps investing in a new smart TV or streaming device as they seek to exploit the rising number of OTT and IPTV services on the market. Indeed, consumers are increasingly demanding higher-quality products as well as richer experiences.



Comcast platform

However, it's not always easy to know which TV or streaming device to buy amid a proliferation of products on the market, not to mention a bewildering array of standards and acronyms that accompany every device.

## Greater fragmentation

Alex Wilkinson, head of sales and marketing at Accedo, said streaming devices and connected TVs have certainly been growing in popularity in recent years. However, that also means more devices to support, which is causing challenges relating to fragmentation and a lack of standardisation.

“As platforms proliferate and streaming providers need to support multiple devices, the cost and complexity of providing a high quality of experience grows considerably,” Wilkinson said.



Alex Wilkinson, ACCEDO

He also noted that supporting multiple devices makes reporting and analytics more complex, “making it challenging for streaming providers to reach and measure audiences holistically. At the same time, in this competitive landscape, it is even more important to ensure you know what your audiences are engaging with so that you can attract and retain subscribers.”

Cees van Versendaal, COO of Mware TV, observed that the same streaming and TV devices are also not available in every market, sometimes as a result of lower deployment or take-up of high-speed broadband services.

### **Smart TVs trending**

In terms of the devices that are available for viewing all these new services, Bart Lozia, CEO of Better Software Group, pointed out that smart TVs are still very popular for OTT content.



Bart Lozia, Better Software Group

“The explosion of their popularity is linked to many factors,” Lozia said. “Smart TVs have vastly improved interfaces, and come with many popular streaming services pre-installed. It’s the optimal viewing device that serves as the centerpiece of entertainment for most households, so our predictions are that this trend will only continue and rise.”

At the same time, van Versendaal said the term “smart TV” is misleading for consumers as smart or connected TVs from different brands have their own operating system while available apps differ from brand to brand.

Van Versendaal also said it is important to note that “while there are a number of choices out there for the consumer when it comes to purchasing a smart TV, these screens are all essentially a closed operating system with no ability to add-on additional apps”.

He noted that LG and Samsung were smart TV market leaders for a long time, “but lost momentum due to their very limited app stores. Currently, it is taking anything between 60 and 90 days for additional apps to be reviewed and made available across LG and Samsung smart TVs, which is not ideal if they want to keep up with consumer demand”.



Cees van Versendaal, Mware TV

Android TV-based smart TVs are gaining traction, reflecting similar trends in mobile devices that have been steadily growing in popularity since the first commercially available smartphones on Android were launched in 2008. In addition, digital media player Roku introduced its own smart TV with the Roku operating system built-in, which provided consumers with access to the Roku App store.

Van Versendaal also pointed to the 2021 launch by Comcast's Sky of Sky Glass, a 4K TV with Sky built in and available to UK and Ireland consumers. "This was swiftly followed by Comcast launching its own XClass TV, with its own operating system inside for the US and North American market," he said.

### **Streaming devices...**

When it comes to streaming devices, van Versendaal points out that "the main advantage is that they can be used with any TV that has an HDMI port".



### **Sky Glass**

He noted that FireTV sticks are very popular in the USA as they provide consumers with access to an app store that includes almost all available current streaming apps.

"Roku devices have also been hugely successful. However we are yet to see the effects of the company's decision to disable all non-certified (or "private") channels in early 2022, which was a popular feature among users."

Android TV-based streaming set-top boxes and dongles are widely available through a number of brands, although van Versendaal said apps like Netflix, for example, are not always made available to consumers.



“This is due to Netflix requiring a separate arrangement with the brand or telco using an Android TV-based set-top box. What is viewed as a discriminating policy might have to now change due to the widely reported decline in Netflix subscribers,” van Versendaal observed.

### **...and streaming provider challenges**

In terms of the challenges that streaming providers face as the choice of home devices grows, Wilkinson said it is critical that providers ensure their service has the same simple, intuitive and cohesive experience on every device.



### **Roku**

“UX is crucial, firstly because it affects brand loyalty. Also, because an easy-to-use and engaging UX, which makes discoverability simple, can be a deciding factor in convincing viewers to choose a particular video service over the competition and stay around,” he said.

Wilkinson emphasised that while fragmentation can be challenging, “it is important for video service providers to capitalise on the opportunity of being on multiple devices, in order to reach as big an audience as possible.”

He further noted that video providers can even look to better target their audiences with personalised content offerings per device and OS type, providing an additional layer of audience segmentation. In the same way, advertisers can choose to advertise only on a particular device or operating system with better ROI.

“Fragmentation done right opens the door to new opportunities. The more devices a service supports, the greater the content reach and the chances of attracting new users. At times, the available platforms can even be a determining factor in choosing a video service,” he concluded.