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Android tv os review

While most of this review won't go google's way, you at least have to admire the brand for its persistence. The latest Android-based smart TV platform - cunningly called Android TV - is, by my calculation, Google's third stab at becoming a force to be counted in the world of smart TV. In fact, the fourth if you also include the early and little seen effort android 4.2 Jelly Bean introduced on some philips high-end TVs in a handful of European territories last year. Let's not forget, too, the large number of external android TV boxes from third parties out there for people who didn't bother to have an integrated solution. Unfortunately for Google, though, while it has achieved success with its relatively simple Chromecast streaming dongle, none of its previous attempts to make an integrated and dedicated TV operating system - to do on TVs what it does so effectively on phones, in other words - has received much success. Its debut google TV platform, in particular, is widely regarded as a rather abject flaw. The great thing about crashes and mistakes, however, is that you can learn from them. So my hopes were sincerely high for the new Lollipop 5.0 version of Android TV when I started using it on one of Sony's new TVs (the recently tested 75X9405C). Not the best of matches Unfortunately android TV looks wrong so you clap your hands for it. While most TV brands are now moving their smart TV platforms to minimal designs that are at the top of the TV images you're watching, calling Android TV on Sony LG sees the Android TV home menu taking over the entire screen. In a world where we all take multitasking for granted, Android TV's refusal to let us continue watching TV while we browse its menus immediately makes it feel exaggerated and dated when compared to the much smoother approach of more discreet smart TV platforms like LG's webOS and Samsung's new Tizen platform. It also flies in the face of the modern wisdom of smart TV with the amount of content options that plays in your face. The home screen is arranged as a series of seven horizontal shelves, with any four shown on the screen at the same time. And each of these shelves is filled with icons that scroll almost endlessly right providing links to apps, content sources and games. Clearly Android TV wants to make it blindly obvious from the very day that it won't suffer the kind of content shortage that so many other smart TV services have suffered over the years. And to some extent you can't blame him for wanting to make a song and dance about how many apps he carries; the wealth of content is, after all, undoubtedly the most compelling reason for a TV maker like Sony to adopt the Android TV platform. The after all, it's already supported by a huge application development community, so chances are it will 'benefit' from far more third-party application support than any proprietary Sony smart TV platform ever could. Less may be more The problem, as the rest of the TV world has has to realize, is that although large amounts of content initially seems to be a force, it is really a weakness. Most people - there are potentially exceptions, which I'll talk about later - don't want their TV's operating system to be cluttered by hordes of apps. Partly because TVs are by their nature relatively passive and shared devices compared to smartphones and tablets, and partly because no TV interface so far has come close to being as capable of searching and browsing huge amounts of content as a smartphone or tablet. It's also a simple fact that some - I'd say, most - of the apps you'll find on a platform as open as Android TV will, to say politely, niche interest. Or to be less polite, many will be useless, trash or both. So the last thing a TV user (unlike a smartphone or tablet) needs is having to go through piles of junk in search of the occasional gem. To be fair to Google, it's not just letting all the apps available for your smart TV and Android tablet platform appear on your TV. It introduced a filtering system to eliminate applications that are not appropriate for a TV environment - games that rely on touch screen controls, for example. But there doesn't seem to be any real attempt to filter apps based on the likelihood of being widely used for a typical TV viewer. This generally rather vague and blurry approach is also unfortunately very visible on the top 'shelf' of the Android TV homepage. This shelf aims to carry recommended content - links to material that Android TV thinks you will be interested in based on what turns out to be a fairly limited assessment of your app's usage habits. Recommended content can include everything from links to YouTube videos and news videos (if you have a compatible news feed app in your list of downloaded apps) to tutorial videos and direct links to movies. The limiting game Although the shelf of recommendations may sound like a good idea in principle, reality is a big one. The engine used to fill the shelf does not work with all applications in your application collection; does not include any analysis of the TV shows you watch; and does not support any personalization provision, which means that there is no way different members of your family establish their own individual recommendation shelves tailored only to their needs. Some items on the recommendation shelf also seem little more than ads - my test sample was very interested in pushing me to movies available through Google's own movie streaming store, for example. The net result of all this is that the Recommendations shelf sits on the of the blurry and at worst dictatorial hypotheses - a million miles away from laser-like focus on recent and favorite content you get on lg's webOS engine homepage. I think there's room for Google to put your house of recommendations in order over time through firmware updates, but frankly, as it stands now, it's a microcosm of everything that's wrong Android TV. So if the top shelf of Google TV is more or less a bust, maybe the second shelf down shows the platform in a more useful light? Unfortunately, no. Called featured apps, as the name suggests the second Shelf Android TV was designed to draw attention to apps that you may have missed, or that have recently been added to the Android TV platform. But I've never had much of a feeling that these featured apps have been particularly tailored to my own interests, which means that again it looks like Android TV is just saying what it thinks you should do instead of trying to give you quick and easy access to things you might actually want to access. Redundant shelves Having already wasted more or less the two main shelves of its home screen, the Android TV knocks down another clanger with its third shelf. Strangely, this is just a long list of icons to access the various TV entries - something that can be achieved much more quickly and directly through the Sony TV remote control. The redundancy of this shelf is merely underlined by the fact that it does not even attempt to order the entry list based on recent usage history. It's only when you get to the fourth shelf of Android TV, simply called apps, that the system does anything to please you to your cause. This shows all the apps you downloaded to your TV - the stuff, in other words, that you've actually shown you want - and even order them based on usage regency, greatly increasing the chances of the first apps on the show being the ones you really want to access. This shelf is also important as it takes portal icons to Google Stores, from where you can download other apps to go on the shelf of your apps. Given the relative uselessness of shelf Apps, it's a shame that Android TV doesn't provide the ease of 'pinning' your favorite apps to the left side of the shelf. And it's even more a shame that Android TV's refusal to let you customize your layout anyway means you can't choose to change the apps shelf to the top of the homepage, above that messy Recommendations shelf. Android TV stores try to help navigate the large number of apps offered by dividing them into four 'themed' shelves, and dividing movies and music into many different genres. However, three of the four initial themed shelves are dedicated to different types of game, with dozens of titles already overloading the shelves. Where games outperform video That seems to me more evidence of a rather fundamental lack of understanding from Google about what most people really want to do on their Smart TVs - especially since, although there may be crowded games, Android TV currently doesn't load as many services streaming video (on a global basis, anyway) as you would expect from a smart TV system in 2015. For example, users in the UK will currently find support for none of the catch-up TV services of major terrestrial broadcasters - which is probably why Sony is adding a 202 TV. 202. in the UK next to Android TV. To be fair, the quality of some of the games offered via Android TV is surprisingly good, with decent graphics and, in some cases, full joystick support. But it seems to me that serious gamers certainly prefer to use the much superior experience of a dedicated console, while casual gamers probably prefer to play on a personal device like a phone or tablet. It's worth adding, too, that many of the games available in the Google store are several gigabytes in size, which means you won't need to download many of them before filling in the 16GB of space that Sony TVs provide. Space that, before asking, cannot be expanded by inserting USB storage devices. And now for the good news So far it's fair to say that I was less than impressed with Android TV. But mercifully there are some good things about it. First, it offers some value as an extra component in a largely Android home. Particularly welcome is Android TV support for Google Cast (which could be used for, say, streaming video from apps available on android SMARTPHONE/tablet OS that are not currently available on Android TV). There is also simplicity with which you can access and play multimedia content stored on Android phones. If you have a TV that supports NFC technology, such as the Sony 75X9405C on which I tested Android TV, you can even connect your personal smart devices to the TV just by tapping them to the TV remote. It's nice to see, too, that Android TV doesn't have an obstructive approach to alternative operating systems. I had no problems setting up Bluetooth connections for sharing content with Apple devices, for example, and it's worth noting, too, that some iOS apps also support casting. Android TV is also available through external devices such as Nvidia Shield. That said, inevitably the Android TV system is at its best with other Android devices, so its compatibility with external devices may not be an attraction for owners of other smartphone/tablet eco systems. In fact, while we're on the subject of different operating systems, I think there's a real possibility that even the name Android TV will have a certain kind of Apple fan running into the hills; a scenario that certainly no TV brand would like to encourage in today's tough TV market. Even when this TV brand is own, like Sony, has invested in the Android platform for its own smartphones and tablets. Returning to the good news (it didn't take long to return to negative territory, wasn't it?). I was pleasantly surprised by the effectiveness of the voice recognition feature that Android TV provides. He recognized what I said more accurately than any voice control system on TV and quickly became an invaluable shortcut tool for searching through content and applications. I must also say that although I have a problem with the full-screen domination approach of android TV menus, these menus are at least delivered to a high standard chart, with with Graphics. Finally, although, as discussed earlier, I generally have concerns about the potential wave of apps that may emerge from the Android development community, it's also possible that this community could deliver some gems that may never be available on 'narrower' platforms like LG's webOS and Samsung's Tizen. Verdict There will undoubtedly be some people who like Android TV. I think it might even be a dream smart TV coming true for the kind of person who doesn't have to share their TV with many - if any! - other people, who are already very connected and experienced about the Android ecosystem, and who don't mind spending much more time searching through app oceans than their typical smart TV user. (Although, in fact, I can't help but think that even this type of user may find themselves starting to wonder why they end up doing the same kind of thing on their TV that they can already do much faster on their other smart devices. Especially given the existence of Google's own Chromecast system! Also, it's worth noting that I'm writing this review as someone I even regularly use Android and iOS devices in my home.) The Sony 75X9405 is the first TV I've tested with Android TV on board. It is also true that Android TV is one step ahead of Google's previous attempts to place its stamp on the integrated world of smart TV: at least it struggles a little harder not to just treat your TV like a great smartphone, anyway. It is likely, too, that Android TV will improve over time through firmware updates, slowly abandoning the feeling it offers now - including some system crashes during my testing - which is an initial Beta version rather than a finished product. Looking at it from the perspective of a typical viewer/home, though, there's simply no escaping the way Android TV falls into a series of classic traps, now quite dated to smart TV. For starters, it's painfully short of customization/customization options. It also flies in the face of less is more, quality on the way quantity that most smart TV systems learned to adopt. You're a lot more interested in saying what you think you should be at than in providing you with shortcuts to what you're really into. Its full-screen presentation makes it impossible to navigate while you keep watching TV. It makes little effort to include live TV in your ecosystem. And finally, still overall it seems to think that most people want to use their TVs the same way they want to use their smartphones. The point is that Google seems to have paid little or no attention to how the world of Smart TV has been developing over the past two years, resulting in an Android TV system that I believe many TV users will find dictatorial, very complicated and, perhaps worst of all, painfully exclusive. If this article interests you, you may also want to check out my recent feature on the identity crisis that currently afflicts smart TV TV

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