My Apple TV Experience

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In a nutshell -

If your Apple TV does not show up as a device in your iTunes application on a PC, make sure that the computer link menu screen with the 5 digit code is visible on the Apple TV while you're looking at the Device list on your iTunes application. This little tidbit is not referred to on any Apple documentation that I've found.

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In the spirit of product quality and sharing the learning, I'd like to let you all know the experience I had purchasing and installing my Apple TV.

I purchased the device in July of 2008, only to get it home and realize neither of my televisions had an HDMI port or an open component port. It seems Apple only supports those two video out capabilities, and I should have seen that before hand. Now I had a choice, return the device or invest in additional home theatre components, I love gadgets so I opted for the 'new' toy scenario.

When it comes to electronics I'm pretty careful and do a lot of comparison shopping. I didn't purchase a new A/V receiver until December 2008. My old one was purchased in 2000, so I thought it was time to upgrade and I even convinced my wife, which for those that know her, is no small feat. Now I have the ability to switch up to three component inputs to a component output.

I am now excited to install the Apple TV. I get it all wired up to the A/V receiver, get it on my home network, and have the ability to view content from the Apple iTunes store. Easy enough. Next step, sync my local content, i.e. photos, music, podcasts, and personal video. When I installed the device I had recorded the code and happily went down to my computer to sync my iTunes library.

Since all of this is quite new to me, I'm not sure what to expect. So I do internet research and read the manuals so that I know what I'm supposed to see, which is the Apple TV under the Devices header on the left panel of iTunes. No Apple TV.

Back to internet research, the first two articles I find are on the Apple TV [support] website. The [first] basically walks you through steps to assure there's no strange configuration issues, i.e. all dependent components are checked and reset. The [second] article gets more deeply into the network configuration assumptions to be sure all components can talk with each other. So I opted to set up my network eliminating as much variability as possible - computer connected to a switch, Apple TV connected to a switch, no router, no DHCP, all manual IP connections, turn off PC firewall. Still no ATV device.

More research was needed. Since I was able to talk to the Apple TV via Airtunes, i.e. set it up as an external speaker from iTunes, I was skeptical about having any network issues. I then found this [article], which introduced me to the fact that the Apple TV announces itself on the network using the Bonjour service protocol. Since that service is different than Airtunes, my hypothesis was the Bonjour service was not working appropriately on my PC platform. So I updated iTunes on an XP box, and my Vista box was already running the latest iTunes, I installed Bonjour for Windows on both boxes and checked to see if the Bonjour IE browser could see the Apple TV. Foiled again.

Okay, I have a Bachelor's and Master's degree in Electrical and Computer engineering, I work in computers everyday - I should know how to do this, why is this so hard? My next step, go to the 'Genius'

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bar at the local Apple store. Which is a very funny name, but I'm not going to jump into that right now! I take the Apple TV to the store and relate all of the troubleshooting steps I've taken to date to the Apple tech. For about 10 minutes with various computers and cables, the tech examines my device. Finally, he says, I'll give you a new one. Okay? I now have a new Apple TV at home - hook it up and voila, no Apple TV in the Device list.

Next step, call customer care. While at the Apple store I learned how to call the support center. After a brief wait, a care agent answers my call. They take me through all of the troubleshooting steps on their website, which I've already done, but the agent insists. Still no luck. They transfer me to a product support engineer and I'm thinking, finally, we're going to get somewhere. Recall that I've simplified my set up to remove any potential harmful variables from the system and it's a network configuration that is recommended in one of the Apple support tech articles. The first thing the product guy says is my configuration is not supported. Okay fine. We reset up my network so that it's what its need to be eventually, so this is actually a good thing. Now we're talking about opening ports in my router. I don't have any firewall rules and as far as I know I'm not blocking any LAN traffic via the router, so I'm not quite sure what's being asked. Since I need to take my daughter to school, I tell the engineer I will look into the ports and get back to him. While I'm running my errand, here's the note I received:

Greetings Chris,

Thank you for calling Apple in regard to your Apple TV. I apologize that we did not have enough time to complete troubleshooting your issue, but please feel free to contact me directly when you are prepared to continue.

My direct phone number is: =-=-=-

Please note that the Apple TV will not appear under the devices list in your iTunes application unless the 5-digit passcode is currently being displayed on your TV screen. If you dismiss the 5-digit code, the Apple TV will no longer be discoverable. To make your Apple TV discoverable once again, you will need to go to the Apple TV's Main Menu, then select Settings. In the settings menu, choose Computers, and choose the option that says "Connect to iTunes"; this will display a 5-digit passcode. The Apple TV will only be discoverable while the 5-digit code is being displayed.

Feel free to take these steps before opening the TCP and UDP ports on your D-Link router to see if your Apple TV can be recognized by iTunes.

It would seem, unlike most other network devices (such as my HP network printers), that the Apple TV doesn't send out it's identifier via the Bonjour method unless the Apple TV UI is in a specific state. Once the iTunes application knows how to find the Apple TV and creates a relationship it no longer needs the Apple TV to announce itself. Personally, I would have preferred a way in the iTunes application to specifically input the IP address or network name so that I could force iTunes to find the network device. I'm not exactly sure what iTunes saves once it finds the Apple TV, I'm guessing it's not the IP address since the Apple TV can use DHCP.

So that worked. After 6 hours of my time to get the device recognized, it's working like a champ. Considering what I paid for the Apple TV and what I invested in getting it working, the total bill is somewhere north of $1000. My wife thinks I'm crazy, but she's digging the slideshows.

I hope this painful story can shorten someone's installation time - Good luck.

- Supply Chain Management [1]

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