

Inside Argos TV's Studios

By Lewis Tyler – Toy News Online – 6th January 2011



We took a tour of the new TV studio and sat down with head of broadcast Paul Tremain, and head of Argos TV, Darren Frost, to find out how the channel works.

The launch of Argos TV might have come as a surprise to some – after all, no other major UK retailer has launched its own TV station – but the question isn't so much: 'Why has Argos launched a TV shopping channel?' It is more: 'Why wouldn't Argos have a TV shopping channel?'

The station went live on June 15th on Sky channel 642 and with the addition of Freesat, Argos TV is now available in 12 million UK homes.

A new channel:

In business news, Argos has become inseparable from the phrase multi-channel. Rather than consolidating or downsizing during the economic downturn, Argos has invested in many multi-channel initiatives. So far it seems to be having the desired effect. In the first half of 2011, multi-channel orders represented 46 per cent of the retailer's total sales, with internet purchases accounting for 33 per cent and mobile apps accounting for four per cent.

A TV shopping channel seems to be the next logical step.

Darren Frost, head of Argos TV, explains: "It's a great opportunity for us to get into a growing market and a real opportunity for us to acquire some new customers.

"The digital switchover means that more homes have access to this platform and therefore TV shopping has grown quite considerably over recent years.

"We've already got the infrastructure as a business to manage multi-channel. We've got a good website, we've got a good delivery operation, we've got a massive range of products, so in that respect it was a very good fit."

That infrastructure and the huge presence of the Argos brand gives the channel a unique style of selling.

"Inform, entertain, sell – those are our three mantras and the main ingredients of what we do on air," says Paul Tremain, head of broadcast.

"We're less hard sell than some channels – we're all about the informed route to purchase. Our major point of difference is the pick up points and the accessibility."

The theory is: if a viewer is interested in a product, but doesn't order, it isn't necessarily a lost sale because there's every chance the customer will fulfil that purchase with Argos in-store or online.

Because of this, presenters aren't under the same pressure to push sales.

Consistency in price is also a key aspect of Argos' multi-channel proposition. With product catalogue numbers, the website address and in-store options constantly reiterated on air, it's crucial that price remains the same no matter where the customer decides to fulfil that purchase.

Frost offers: "Our price is consistent across the whole business. We can influence the pricing dependant on what's featured and what's scheduled, but we wouldn't ever want to put ourselves in a position where we're giving different customers the same product for different prices.

Play time:

The informative editorial style of Argos TV lends itself well to toys – which Tremain reveals is one of the biggest categories.

He explains: "The way we do toys is a strong USP for us over the other channels. We regularly use guests from vendors and brands – most recently we had Dr Deborah Webber from Fisher-Price product research and development.

"This coupled with our resident toy expert, Ella Williamson, allows us to create credibility for the viewer and helps them make informed purchasing decisions."

In the run up to Christmas, Argos will double or even triple the amount of airtime dedicated to toys on certain days.

The Leapfrog range is currently being showcased in the Kids Corner – the regular toy hour. Ella Williamson joins presenter Rachel Pierman and kicks things off with the LeapPad. Together they give a detailed look at the tablet's features. Although the presentation is underpinned by an undeniable sales edge, there is an editorial credibility.

"I'm not given any sales chat or targets to meet for the shows, my job is to explore the products and have a good play," explains Williamson.

"My role is to talk through and demonstrate key features of the products, bring industry knowledge and help the viewer make an informed purchase. We read customer reviews on air too."

While toys appear on other TV programmes, what other station would devote this amount of time for an explanation of a product?

Frost says: "Toys are more and more becoming educational tools than entertainment tools. "For us to be able to connect with parents and say – 'Here's somebody from Leapfrog and they'll tell you the science behind this toy and how it aids development' – I think is a great service and a phenomenal step forward."

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