

Smart shopping

Argos pioneers text service

Buying from Argos has become even easier with the help of Vodafone's Big Mobile solution. Customers can now check prices and reserve items with a text message sent over any UK mobile phone network, making home shopping a very attractive option. This new approach is already helping to drive up sales and boost customer loyalty.



Multi-channel strategy succeeds

Argos, the pioneer of catalogue retailing, is part of the Argos Retail Group owned by GUS plc. Its network of more than 500 outlets – with 35 new locations planned each year for the next five years – means that most people in the UK live within a ten-mile radius of an Argos store.

Massive investments in its supply chain are planned over the next few years, as new IT and software programmes are brought in to improve stock controls, sales planning and business forecasts.

Its entry into the direct sales market has proved a dramatic success, with sales via Argos Direct, the home delivery operation, growing by 50% over the past year and accounting for 16% of the company's total sales.

The multi-channel sales strategy enables customers to enjoy the same high standards of products and service from Argos stores, its web site or via the telephone. Customers can also reserve goods remotely, then collect at the store of their choice.

Click & Collect is the name of the online service, **Ring & Reserve** covers the telephone, and customers now have another option thanks to Vodafone – **Text & Take Home**.

The new service lets customers check prices, stock availability and reserve items at the store of their choice. Customers text the catalogue number of the goods they want to reserve and a code for their nearest store, and then send via a text message (SMS) to **Vodafone's Big Mobile** number, in this case 07786 201 201. A reservation code is sent to the customer's handset, and this is used to identify the order when it's collected.

Andy Morrey, New Channel Development Manager at Argos, explains: "This is a very easy way for anyone to shop because virtually all our customers now have a mobile phone and they are comfortable with sending text messages.

"They feel the standard 10p or 12p charge for a text message represents good value for money, and just two messages lets them secure their chosen goods."

It's faster and simpler than making a telephone call with the added bonus of having a reservation order sent to their handset, so there's no confusion over what was ordered.

Text & Take Home is expected to make an impact in three key areas. First, offering customers a very simple way to shop without leaving the comfort of their own homes gives a competitive advantage over High Street rivals who only operate normal business hours. A key benefit to Argos customers is that they no longer need to make a trip to the store, only to find the item they want is no longer available.

Second, the automated text input is very fast to process and responses are quick. Other methods such as voice calls and reserving via the Internet can take more time and cost more money per reservation.

And third, as texting facilitates two-way communications between Argos and its customers, the company hopes to encourage closer relationships.

One number, one contract

Vodafone Big Mobile is a relatively new service, launched in March last year, and maximises the potential of SMS within any organisation's marketing or promotional campaigns. Previously, any company who wanted to use text messaging as part of its communications with customers had to find ways of coping with people on various networks. Response numbers had to be set up and this led to overcrowded promotional material displaying different numbers for the networks.

The administration of running such a programme was also complex and costly. However, Vodafone has overcome all the problems with **Big Mobile**, which gives large companies the opportunity for two-way text messages with customers, suppliers or employees on any network using just one number. There's just one contract, one connection and lower administrative costs.

Companies can now have direct contact with their target customers and use the service for competitions or marketing. Captured information sent from customers can be stored and used for future campaigns.

Vodafone Big Mobile is also a tremendous boost for internal communications, as it can be used to send information quickly and easily to large numbers of employees at the same time.

'Mobilising' the product range

Argos recognised the solutions' potential and were keen to be an early user of Vodafone Big Mobile plus bulk SMS. Already an established Vodafone customer with a relationship covering several years, Argos worked with Vodafone and their selected 'application developer' to integrate mobile messaging into their stock control system. Thereby, enabling customers to access Argos merchandise whenever and wherever they please.

A specific application on the SIM cards of Vodafone pre-pay handsets sold by Argos makes it easier to prepare and send text messages, but handsets connected to any UK network can use the service just as easily. The Argos-specific menu on these handsets also provides a direct dial route through to Argos Customer Care.

For more information on Vodafone Big Mobile, visit the Vodafone web site www.vodafone.co.uk/corporate/bigmobile or call the Vodafone Business Development Team on 08700 700 900.

