



freesat honours its stars

Simon King reports on the inaugural Freesat Awards in London

The inaugural Freesat Awards, held in London last month, have been heralded as a major success by the subscription-free satellite platform. The Pigalle Club in Piccadilly was the venue for the awards, the aim of which was to recognise the contribution made by manufacturers, retailers and channels to Freesat's success.

More than 190 people gathered to celebrate all that is good about Freesat. Winners were recognised across nine categories during a ceremony hosted by stand-up comedian and TV personality, Sean Lock.

Emma Scott, Freesat's managing director, told guests at the awards ceremony: "Tonight has been a wonderful celebration of a brilliant first year for Freesat. I'd like to congratulate the winners and thank all Freesat's partners who have contributed to our success so far.

"Having already reached 400,000 sales and with on-demand IPTV services, such as BBC iPlayer, on the way this year, we're looking forward to building on this success through 2009 and beyond."

This year's winners were chosen by a panel of industry experts, including *guardian.co.uk* editor Janine Gibson, Digital TV Group chairman and *Broadcast* columnist David Docherty, media commentator Mark Borkowski, *Radio Times* TV editor Alison Graham and Freesat's Ms Scott. The panel was chaired by Mike Chandler, managing director of Astra – the event's main sponsor.

James Atkins, Freesat's trade marketing manager, told *ERT* that his company was delighted with the excellent turnout for the awards, particularly as it was the first year.

He added: "The evening was definitely a triumph and it was great to see so many representatives from the manufacturers, retailers and channels that have contributed to Freesat's success.

"All our guests had an enjoyable evening and we received a large number of emails of thanks the following day, which was very nice.

"In turn, we would like to thank Astra, Panasonic and the other sponsors for helping us create a brilliant event for our partners."

Mr Atkins said it was hoped that the Freesat Awards would become an annual event.

"The awards reflect the great strides the platform has made in only its first year," he said.

"As the service grows and evolves, the awards will, too."

While the awards recognised the achievements of manufacturers, retailers and channels, Mr Atkins pointed out that the retail channel had been central to Freesat's plans since launch and would continue "to play a key role in educating consumers on the benefits and features of Freesat".

He added: "We've learned that live demonstrations and staff training are central to success with significant sales uplifts in stores that have invested in both."

Looking to the future, Mr Atkins said there were some "great developments on the horizon" and that it was important that retailers continue to give consumers the best advice.

"As switchover continues, the multi-room message is increasingly important," he said. "Freesat, as a subscription-free service, provides the perfect solution for consumers and a great sell-up opportunity for retailers."

Mr Atkins continued: "Our strong sales performance so far tells us that that our subscription-free offer of more than 140 channels, plus HD from the BBC and ITV, is a compelling one.

"For analogue or Freeview homes, Freesat offers viewers an upgrade without having to sign up to a costly contract and subscription package.

"For pay-TV homes, Freesat offers a means of eradicating monthly television bills, while enjoying a wide choice of channels and high-definition."

Mr Atkins said that retailer training was a continuous process and that as Freesat launched new services, such as IPTV later this year, it would play a vital role in equipping retailers with the knowledge to deliver the correct message to consumers.

● *Freesat training can be booked by calling Freesat's retailer support number 0845 313 0059.*



Freesat MD
Emma Scott

The winners

ERT 'Take A Town' Independent Retailer of the Year: Hickmans, Swindon



Colin Small, manager of Hickmans (left) with award sponsor ERT's editor Simon King

Multiple Retailer of the Year: John Lewis



John Kempner of John Lewis (left) with Bradley Keenan of award sponsor iSite TV

Product of the Year: Humax Freesat+



Humax's Graham North (right) with Richard Melville, editor of award sponsor What Hi-Fi Sound & Vision

Freesat Installer of the Year: TSG

sponsored by the Confederation of Aerial Industries

Best Daytime Digital Channel: PopGirl/Wedding TV sponsored by Humax

Best Digital News Channel: Al Jazeera English sponsored by LG Electronics

Best Evening Digital Channel: BBC Four sponsored by Panasonic

Best Digital Radio Station: Planet Rock sponsored by The Pitch Group

Viewers' Choice for Channel of the Year: BBC HD sponsored by Arqiva