

Broadcast

Argonon sets up fact ent indies

9 March, 2017 | By [Peter White](#)



Establishes Bandicoot & Barefaced TV

UK production group Argonon has launched two factual entertainment joint ventures as it enters its next stage of growth.

The indie group, led by *Cash In The Attic* creator James Burstall, has established Barefaced TV, headed up by *Snog* *Marry Avoid?* producers Rosie Bray and Lucy Golding, and Bandicoot, run by entertainment producers Derek McLean and Daniel Nettleton.

Burstall said the joint-venture model had worked well as a "handrail" to help Transparent and Brite Spark "get up the stairs" and is an approach he is keen to replicate.

"It's important to retain the cottage-industry flavour of the individual brands because we know commissioners want the bespoke couture of individual producers," he said. "Executive producers are becoming incredibly entrepreneurial and starting to understand the value of rights."

Global focus

Bray, who was the voice of Pod on the BBC3 format, and Golding were most recently joint heads of factual entertainment at NBC Universal's development unit Telly copter.

Prior to joining the US studio, they founded Spun Gold offshoot Brassy, where they created BBC2's Restaurant Wars and Channel 4's The Millionaire Party Planner.

Burstall said the pair, who will focus on globally friendly factual entertainment formats and features, had "creative chutzpah".

They will be joined in Argonon's Angel headquarters by McLean and Nettleton's Bandicoot, which will create "wild and twisted" entertainment formats with a focus on reality and comedy.

McLean was previously head of non-scripted for Lime Pictures, where he oversaw The Only Way Is Essex and Geordie Shore, as well as several US series, while Nettleton spent six years at NBC Universal as head of development and head of entertainment. Burstall called the pair "mischievous".

The new labels will sit alongside Mutiny producer Windfall Films, Eve producer Leopard Films, Fifteen To One indie Remedy Productions, Jazz Gowans' Transparent Television and BriteSpark Films. The new labels form part of Burstall's second five-year business plan, following the foundation of the group in 2011.

He said he had turned down "lots of approaches" to sell Argonon, and that declining investment from private equity and venture capital firms had given the group more "creative latitude".

"I've had my eye on the marketplace for the past two years but it became clear that after our first five years, we're not ready to sell and we don't need to take investment," he said.

In addition to boosting its non-scripted credentials, the group is making a renewed push into scripted content. In December, it appointed former BBC comedy commissioner Kristian Smith, who ordered Mackenzie Crook series Detectorists, as chief creative officer of Leopard.

Smith has been tasked with bringing in "big-name comedy talent" to work on long-running comedy dramas.

"Drama commissioners have been stacked up with dark, Scandi-style thrillers and now they are looking for much lighter, more comedic dramas. We've responded to that by bringing in Kristian," said Burstall.

"Drama, like factual, is going in two directions: there's big event pieces that cost more than £1m and at the other end, every network needs long-running bankers that tend to be lower-cost. They are of interest to us too."

Argonon is also investing in the US through Leopard Films. Former Pulse Films television boss Richard Cook, who is senior vice-president of talent at Leopard Films USA, will open Leopard West to focus on female-skewing projects for the US cable networks.

DIVERSITY AT ARGONON

Argonon has launched a series of diversity targets to bring the production group into line with the UK population by 2020.

Currently, 16% of its staff are from a black, Asian or ethnic minority background and the group wants to increase this to at least 20% over the next three years. Similarly, 4% of its staff disclosed a disability and it is keen to increase this to at least 6%.

Some 54% of its workforce is female, above the 50% national average, although only 29% of its executive team is female, while 13% of staff are lesbian, bisexual, gay or transgender, above the 6% UK average.

Chief executive James Burstall said it is important to put "transparent" targets in place to have an impact on the TV industry.