

8th February 2006



FilmFour to relaunch as UK's only major free-to-air film channel

Press Release

Channel 4 has today confirmed that it is to relaunch FilmFour as the UK's only major free-to-air film channel, available at no cost to every digital TV home in the country from July.

The channel will launch on Freeview for the first time, but will also be on offer to all cable and satellite viewers without the need to pay a monthly subscription. On digital satellite, the FilmFour channel will be available to freesat viewers as well as Sky digital customers.

The new FilmFour channel will be available in a forecast 18 million homes by the end of 2006, compared to the 300,000 plus subscribers who currently pay up to £7 a month to receive the service.

Andy Duncan, Channel 4 Chief Executive, said: "Channel 4 has a pedigree in film that is second to none amongst British broadcasters – we've not only showcased the best films on Channel 4 and FilmFour, we've actually funded and produced many of them as well. E4 has shown the ratings gains that can be made by going free-to-air and I'm convinced that a highly distinct and desirable brand like FilmFour can also make an impact on a wider audience."

From July the new free-to-air FilmFour will screen six films a day, starting at 3pm and coming off air at 3am. Films will typically start every two hours and the channel will offer a broader range of films than any other UK film channel, with classic films earlier in the day giving way to modern Hollywood output and the best of US and UK independent cinema in peak and foreign language and cult cinema late night.

The channel will also premiere key titles financed and co-produced by Channel 4's film division, Film Four Productions, and will showcase the best of British and European cinema. It will programme seasons, events and short form programming, which were a successful feature of the pay FilmFour service.

The new FilmFour channel will carry advertising breaks within films for the first time.

The FilmFour free-to-air relaunch will involve the closure of FilmFour Weekly, although it is Channel 4's intention to keep a one-hour time-shifted version of the relaunched channel, FilmFour+1, running on digital satellite and cable platforms.

As well as launching the new free-to-air film channel, Channel 4 is also planning the launch of a FilmFour branded video-on-demand subscription service on various media platforms – including broadband, mobile and cable – to follow later in the year.

Duncan added: "This change will significantly extend our presence in multi-channel homes in advance of digital switchover. It will also strengthen our public service contribution by offering regular showcases for British and European movies, including films financed by Channel 4 itself through its £10m annual production fund.

“Our plans to launch FilmFour On Demand, available on broadband platforms, will enhance viewer choice further and complement the free-to-air offering.

“FilmFour has always been about great films you know and great films you don’t – now all those great films will be absolutely free.”

Notes to editors

FilmFour background

- FilmFour launched on 1st November 1998 and was available on a subscription-only basis in digital cable and satellite homes.
- The FilmFour pay-TV service currently has in excess of 300,000 subscribers, each paying up to £7 a month to receive the service.
- In return for their monthly fee, subscribers on most pay-TV digital platforms receive three FilmFour channels – FilmFour, FilmFour Weekly and FilmFour +1.
- The service previously included further spin-off channels – FilmFour World and FilmFour Extreme – but these were folded back into the main FilmFour service in 2003 as the result of a restructure.
- The FilmFour channel was previously available on the digital terrestrial TV platform as part of the ITV Digital pay-TV package, but ceased broadcasting on DTT when the platform closed in 2002.

E4 and More4 on Freeview

- E4 has almost doubled its audience share since launching on Freeview in May last year – the channel has secured a 2.3% share of all viewing in multi-channel homes so far in 2006 (to 5th February) compared to 1.25% in the same period last year, an increase of 86%.
- Since its launch on Freeview, E4 has overtaken Sky One to become the most popular multi-channel service amongst younger viewers. The channel has enjoyed a 4% share of viewing amongst the 16 to 34-year-old audience year-to-date (to 5th February) compared to 2.5% in the same period last year, an increase of 63%.
- More4 has exceeded its audience targets since launching on all digital TV platforms in October last year. The channel has secured a 0.52% share of all viewing in multi-channel homes since launch and 0.74% of the ABC1 Adult audience, compared to 0.35% and 0.51% for BBC 4 over the same time period, making it the most upmarket of all digital TV channels.
- Since launch 56% of More4 viewing has come from Freeview homes and the channel enjoys a share of viewing on the digital terrestrial platform of 1%.