

Annette Sullivan (MBA '01-GEMBA)

Vice-President, Marketing The Shopping Channel

Interview by Karen Christensen



What is The Shopping Channel's mission?

First of all, I'm proud to say that we are celebrating our 20th anniversary this year. **The Shopping channel** is Canada's only nationally-televised, 24-hour shop-at-home service, available on a variety of cable channels across the country. We have

the pleasure of servicing hundreds of thousands of Canadians each year by providing a wide product selection at competitive prices; we carry both brand-name items and unique 'new to the market' items that can't be found anywhere else. Our products range from fashions to household items to Canada's largest selection of jewellery. Our mission is to provide customers with high-quality, exceptional value and convenience – and we aim to do the same with our online offering, theshoppingchannel.com.

Is there anything the Shopping Channel will not sell?

Yes, there are several things, including genuine furs, firearms, liquor and tobacco.

Describe your audience.

We reach over seven million households in English Canada and are watched by almost two million viewers weekly. Our viewing audience is approximately 50-50 male and female, but our customers are predominantly female. They range in age from 25 to 55+ and live in both urban and suburban households. Our customers are sophisticated shoppers; they do extensive research and price comparisons before making a purchase.

What is your fondest memory of your Rotman MBA experience?

I had some very interesting professors at Rotman, whom I remember fondly. I completed my MBA on a part-time basis, so my memories are of being at class in the evenings, studying alongside a crowd of accomplished professionals. I remember showing up at class at the end of a work day, feeling tired and lethargic, and then finding myself rejuvenated by the rigour of my studies, and by professors who challenged us to really strive for our academic achievements. If you wanted to achieve something great, you had to work hard for it.

What are your greatest challenges at the moment?

Our greatest challenge is developing that elusive entity, customer loyalty. Like in any business, this entails making sure that our customers are satisfied and really wowing them with

the experience. We are continually refining these aspects. Also, because we are broadcasters, many of the day-to-day challenges are on-air challenges – things going wrong or not working. And our big-picture challenge is the same as with any modern company: it's all about getting really good people and retaining them.

How can people get their products onto The Shopping Channel?

We hold 'open houses' a couple of times per year, where people can come in and make a pitch to our buyers. The products that do best on our Channel share similar characteristics: they are unique; they are in limited distribution (often exclusive to us); their features can be demonstrated on TV; and they offer exceptional value – the retail price plus shipping charges must provide value to consumers compared to competitive products in the retail category.

What would you say you're most proud of to date?

That's easy: my people. In my career I've had a lot of associate staff that have really risen within the ranks, either within this company or elsewhere, in jobs they have branched out to. I have mentored quite a few of them, and it's extremely fulfilling to watch them grow. I'm really proud of my staff, both present and past.

Would you say The Shopping Channel has been affected yet by the move towards the more green products and services?

In terms of the products we sell, not yet. But we are very conscious of the packaging we use in our shipping process, which we try to minimize; and internally we are always looking at ways to cut back in terms of lighting, garbage, those sorts of things.

As a consumer, what are you proud to consume, and what is your 'guilty pleasure'?

I consume everything – I am a real shopper. For me, it's entertainment; I just love going to stores to relax. My guilty pleasures would have to be chocolate and red wine.

What do you do for fun?

I travel a lot with my husband. Most recently we went to Bora Bora and Easter Island. We're not really into 'fun in the sun' trips; we like to go off the beaten path. Next on our list is South Africa.