

Media and advertisers missing out by ignoring the disabled

 By [Chris Mberdyk](#)

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A few years ago, I was lying in bed with one of those inner ear viruses that makes your head spin just by moving your eyes sideways or up and down. (Video)

And every now and then out of sheer boredom I would pick up a newspaper or turn on the television when the music or talk shows on my bedside radio got boring.

All sorts of things popped up on television that irritated the daylights out of me. Programmes featuring fancy camera work by focus pullers with St Vitus Dance or ads with wavy lines, spirals or special effects that had me feeling like I just been on a three day methylated spirits binge.

And I got to thinking not only about how the media and marketers still don't do the disabled any justice but also how they seem to be missing out on all sorts of opportunities.



I know that e.tv and all the SABC TV stations have news bulletins specially adapted for deaf people and those with partial hearing impairments have someone on the screen tucked away in a corner doing sign language.

I know that at the offices of most of our media have ramps for people in wheelchairs.

But frankly, I don't think having the occasional sign language feature on a news bulletin and the odd wheelchair ramp is doing anything but scratch the surface.

We've met other challenges... why not this one?

Now I'll probably be told that there are all sorts of technical reasons why our newspapers and magazines can't have at least a few Braille inserts that regular sighted readers can hand out to people they know who are blind.

But humans have managed to overcome all sorts of other technical difficulties and I can't see why this should present too much of a problem.

Possibly the most compelling reasons for not including Braille inserts in newspapers and magazines is one of cost.

And the answer to this is probably to have marketers and media get together. I am not sure how many blind people there are in South Africa but I would imagine that however many there are, they should represent an economically viable market or series of niche markets in various LSM groups.

The key to it all is that sighted people who consume media surround them.

So, surely it makes sense for some advertisers, where appropriate and relevant, to have a Braille insert, say with one of their tabloid ad inserts in community papers, or in terms of mass media to devote a section of an ad insert to Braille.

Reach out - and you won't only earn brownie points

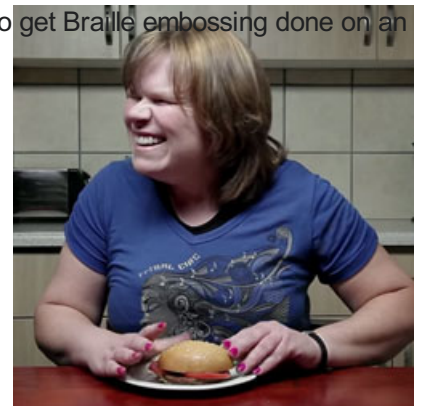
Obviously most of this will have to be on inserts and not run of paper because I would imagine that with the majority of our

printing presses being so old they battle to get proper colour registers let alone be able to get Braille embossing done on an offset printing system.

But, technical challenges aside, I believe there are a lot of advertisers in this country that would not only score huge PR brownie points by reaching out to the disabled, but would also profit handsomely from it.



It would be fascinating to see whether any research could uncover products not necessarily used by blind or other disabled people but products that are bought by them or the purchase of which influenced by them.



Radio is a particularly powerful medium when it comes to targeting all disabled people other than those who are deaf.

While there seem to be enormous opportunities for marketers to score PR points and profit from targeting the disabled, our media, particularly television, needs to be conscious of not doing dumb things that makes the lives of disabled people even more disabling.

I am not suggesting being politically correct. I believe the majority of disabled people have no problem with having a little innocent fun poked at them. I am still convinced to this day that the Nando's ad featuring that [blind old lady walking into a pole](#) when her guide dog was distracted by the smell of Nando's chicken, was actually enjoyed by the majority of blind people even though they couldn't see it. And that it was only a few sighted Mother Grundies who had it banned.

But there are still a lot of TV ads and programmes, as I discovered, that can cause considerable discomfort to viewers and those who produce these commercials and programmes just need to be mindful of the harm they cause by gratuitous video grandstanding.

The Wimpy Braille burger ad

ABOUT CHRIS MOERDYK

Apart from being a corporate marketing analyst, advisor and media commentator, Chris Moerdyk is a former chairman of Bizcommunity. He was head of strategic planning and public affairs for BMW South Africa and spent 16 years in the creative and client service departments of ad agencies, ending up as resident director of Lindsay Smithers-FCB in KwaZulu-Natal. Email Chris on moerdykc@gmail.com and follow him on Twitter at [@chrismoerdyk](https://twitter.com/chrismoerdyk).
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