

The radio commercial

 By [Chris Brewer](#)

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South Africa hasn't always performed well in terms of quality of radio advertising.

We don't seem to be able to get the hang of it somehow. Oh there have been several outstanding campaigns in the past but, as a rule, they're deadly dull – often sounding like an afterthought.

Because radio is often a “background” medium, the advertising has to work especially hard to become more intrusive than, say, a TV commercial, a pop-up on Facebook or a WhatsApp message.

Radio appeals to the *Theatre of the Mind* and, correctly written, the radio commercial can achieve what no other medium can do, simply because it stimulates the most creative and receptive medium known to man – our *intelligence*. Visual images can be created with words (so much better than digital or any other technique) that the human mind makes its own, so that no two “images” are likely to be the same. This “painting with words” far exceeds the capability of any concept known before.



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First off, the *copy platform* (or “approach”) will be agreed upon.

There are many, which include:

- Institutional
- Hard-sell
- Soft-sell
- Humour
- News, etc.

The writer will consider sound effects (SFX), jingles, dual dialogue and so forth.

Here's a list of important criteria for your next radio commercial:

1. Is there enough time to include all the words *comfortably*?
2. Is it easy to understand? Try reading it aloud.
3. Is the message consistent with your advertising material in other media?
4. Are there unnecessary or complicated words that could be replaced or omitted altogether?
5. Are **all** the facts included? Sometimes even a minor detail can swing the deal. For example, I once bought a car based on the fact that it had cup holders.
6. Is the simple point you're trying to communicate spelled out with absolute clarity? Should it be repeated more than once to be really sure?
7. Is the commercial honest? (Don't lie to consumers – they always find out and then you're finished).
8. How many times is the product name repeated? (A good rule of thumb is about 4 times in every 30-second commercial).
9. Does it have an **arresting** component? Will the listener stop what he's doing (hopefully not driving) and pay attention to what you have to say?
10. Does the commercial **ask for the business**? Does it encourage immediate action? Does it SELL?

This last point applies to all aspects of business, of course. It never ceases to amaze me how seldom businessmen actually **ask for the order**. Astonishing.

We're moving house next week and I went to buy some different sized cardboard boxes from a packaging shop. A very competent young man helped by fetching the sizes I needed and left me at the till with the manageress.

At no point did anyone ask me if I had enough bubble wrap, packaging tape and labels (which I don't, by the way). It's not difficult to get additional business – just as it's not so difficult to write an effective radio commercial. You may not win any awards but you will, hopefully, sell a lot of product.

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ABOUT CHRIS BREWER

Having joined the ad industry in London, Chris Brewer spent most of his career in media analysis and planning - but has performed just about every advertising task from Creative to Research. He's an honorary lifetime member of the Advertising Media Association and regularly advises agencies and clients regarding their media plan costs and strategies. He is also often asked to talk at industry functions. Email: chris@brewers.co.za. Twitter: [@brewersapps](https://twitter.com/brewersapps). Read his blog: www.brewersdroop.co.za

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