

# Palavra Viva - a Successful Concept of Religious TV Spots in Brazil

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**I**n Brazil, television has always been a challenge for the Catholic Church. There are only a few religious television programmes, the majority of which are produced by religious movements. The production costs are very high, and the prices for broadcasting time are expensive.

In this special situation, a group of religious congregations started a common project for a television programme directed at people who normally have no contact with the church. The association 'Palavra Viva' ("Vivid Word") was founded in January 1993. From April of that year onwards the programmes of Palavra Viva were broadcast by Sistema Brasileiro de Televisão (SBT), which is - after TV Globo - the second national TV network. The transmission of the spots, which have a duration of only two minutes, is gratis. During last year, more and more local TV stations have offered the transmission of a daily spot

free of charge. At the moment, more than 500 TV stations broadcast the Palavra Viva programme. In the meantime more than 270 spots have been produced.

The message is simple. The starting point is a typical daily life situation presenting common people with their problems. At the end, the spot presents a solution to this problem, and the story concludes with citations from the Bible demonstrating that the Good News is a powerful source which illuminates life and stands by the human being, come rain come shine.

The success of our television spots is mainly due to the technical and artistic quality, the open attitude, the ecumenical orientation and the educational purposes presented with the greatest of ease. Every story is played by professional actors and the complete production process is realised by communication professionals to guarantee high television quality. One principle preoccupation is that the Good News is presented in an honorable way, utilising the specific language of the medium and the daily context of the people.

The good reception of the television spots led to the preparation of a collection "Palavra Viva-Video" each consisting of 16 selected stories about a specific theme. At the moment the collection comprises 11 titles: Family, community, solidarity, spirituality, hope in the new society, love and friendship, youth, health and life, tales and narrations, celebrations and special memorial days. Palavra Viva also started a radio programme based on the same principles: short stories of five minutes each which are broadcast through more than 140 Catholic radio stations throughout Brazil. Palavra Viva is the work of many people. About 45 religious congregations give their financial support, some of their members are part of the staff, and many lay professionals participate. The continuity of the TV programme was only possible due to the idealism of the staff. Their resources are limited and the production costs are very high. At present Palavra Viva does not have own technical equipment, so from the financial point of view the survival of Palavra Viva remains the principle challenge.

The first step in the production process is the selection of the biblical phrases realised by the Biblical Reflection Group which is accompanied by the exegete Dr. Shigeyuki Nakanose svd. Along with the biblical phrases the group presents a small study on the signification of the phrase, the context in which it was written, the message it has today and some proposals on how to realise the theme. This draft is presented to the script-writers and the production team, and with the participation of some external assessors the scripts are developed and supervised. The spot will only be realised when the story actually corresponds to the biblical phrase and when the quality standards for TV and broadcasting are maintained.

Spots of two minutes duration seem to be very short, nevertheless the production process is really complex. For financial reasons as well as the dynamics of production, the shooting is realised four times per year. In 1995 the aim is to shoot 120 programmes. Each programme costs about US\$ 3,000.00, an amount which represents a high price for an organisation without commercial purposes, and depending on goodwill contributions from its associates. On the other hand, paying for the broadcasting time would be much more expensive: to purchase broadcasting time at 07.00 hrs. would cost US\$ 250,000.00 per month for the daily transmission of the two-minute spots.

From our point of view the perspectives of the association are promising. During the two years that Palavra Viva exists, the association has achieved positive results with a great part of the public as well as many TV stations. The radio programmes are also becoming increasingly popular. The economic difficulties could be resolved in the long term as the Catholics feel the necessity to guarantee a steady presence in television. A starting point could be the recently founded Campaign of the "Friends of Palavra Viva Association". But the principle preoccupation is - and will remain - evangelisation: to permit that the values of the Gospel can penetrate the culture and inspire the human being for the construction of a society reigned by justice, fraternity and solidarity.

Typical daily life situations

Video collection

#### RESUME

Depuis sa création en 1993, l'association "Palavra Viva" (Parole Vivante) a produit plus de 270 spots de deux minutes diffusés aujourd'hui par plus de 500 stations de TV à travers tout le Brésil. "Palavra Viva" regroupe une quarantaine de congrégations religieuses qui contribuent financièrement et en personnel à la production de ces spots centrés sur la vie quotidienne des gens, proposant des solutions à leurs problèmes et montrant comment l'Evangile peut être une source d'inspiration et de ressourcement pour leur vie personnelle et en faveur d'une société plus juste, plus fraternelle et plus solidaire. Les producteurs ont réussi, malgré les difficultés financières dues aux coûts élevés de la production télévisée, à créer des programmes dynamiques et attractifs demandés par le public et par les stations de TV qui diffusent ces spots gratuitement.

#### RESUMEN

Desde su fundación en enero 1993 'Palavra Viva', una asociación de producción videástica mantenida por 45 congregaciones religiosas brasileñas, ha producido más de 270 spots religiosos. Los programas de una duración de dos minutos cada uno presentan una pequeña escena de la vida diaria, y al presentar la solución del conflicto señalado se termina citando la frase bíblica correspondiente. Obviamente un señal que esta concepción corresponde al gusto de los televidentes es que actualmente más de 500 estaciones de televisión en todas las regiones de Brasil transmiten estos spots de forma gratuita. Los programas requieren un cuidadoso proceso de producción para poder transmitir un mensaje convincente que a la vez corresponde a las necesidades técnicas como al formato específico de la televisión.