

**Prepared Remarks of Rena J. Comisac
Acting Assistant Attorney General**

**ADA Business Connection Leadership Meeting
McDonald's Corporation Hamburger University
Oak Brook, Illinois
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Thank you, Loretta, for the kind introduction. My thanks to Don Thompson, of McDonald's, and Marca Bristo, of Access Living, for co-hosting this meeting and bringing together this extraordinary group of people. Thank you also to Susan Palmer Mazrui Director, Federal Regulatory Affairs for AT&T, and John Lewicki, Marketing Director for McDonald's USA, for speaking today about the power of inclusive advertising to improve business accessibility and welcome the market of people with disabilities. I also want to thank Kevin Bradley, Director of Inclusion and Diversity for McDonald's, for his work in making this meeting possible.

Most notably, thank you all for making time in your busy schedules. We appreciate your willingness to participate in this important discussion that we call the ADA Business Connection Leadership meeting.

We have with us today experts from organizations that have made history in the arena of inclusive advertising with people with disabilities. In the 1980s, McDonald's was in the forefront of the effort with its television ads featuring college students who are deaf and integrating wheelchair users in general shots. In 2001, Cingular -- now AT&T -- featured in its Super Bowl ad artist Dan Keplinger, who has cerebral palsy. In March of this year, McDonald's introduced its "Citizen Celebrities" packaging campaign, which includes Terri Kacie, who rappels off cliffs using her wheelchair. These pioneers have sent a message through their advertisements that customers with disabilities are important to their businesses.

McDonald's and Cingular/AT&T are among a growing -- but still relatively small -- number of corporations that produce positive television or print ads that include people with disabilities. For example, Nordstrom, Target, and Toys "R" Us have long track records for their commitment to inclusive print advertising; a 2005 Reebok ad featured edgy wheelchair rugby player Mark Zupan in its "I am What I am" global campaign; Kohler won fans with its ad showing a blind partygoer appreciating the design of his host's bathroom sink; and Avis, Home Depot, and Doritos ads salute the talents of athletes with disabilities. These ads are a refreshing change from the continuing stereotypic media portrayals of people with disabilities as villains, victims, or inspirational characters.

It quickly becomes clear that positive, inclusive advertisements provide multiple benefits for both the audience and the sponsors. Individuals with disabilities gain tangible access to businesses' goods and services and also gain the more intangible benefit of being seen in popular media as participants in everyday life activities like buying shoes, going to parties, playing basketball, and becoming a home do-it-yourselfer. Companies gain new appreciative customers -- people with disabilities, older adults who benefit from accessible features, family and friends who patronize only establishments that value customers with disabilities, and the general public who supports businesses that promote customer diversity.

And those customers represent a substantial segment of our population with a substantial amount of money to spend. Fifty-million-plus people with disabilities, seventy-million-plus Baby Boomers, and almost 21 million American families that have at least one member with a disability means millions of people with billions of dollars to spend.

MetLife's Mature Market Institute found in 2005 that the estimated annual spending power of the Baby Boomers alone was more than two trillion dollars. A 2007 Nielsen Company and Age Lessons study found that within the group of Boomers there is a new subset that the study calls "pivot spenders." Pivot spenders are Baby Boomers who provide financial support to elderly or retired parents or help out an adult child not in college while still supporting a family at home. Boomers, the report stated, are responsible for at least 55% of consumer spending and are shopping for multiple households.

For those of you connected with the restaurant industry, let me bring to your attention two new reports, one called "Understanding the Casual Dining Market and Its Customers 2007" and the other called "Understanding the Quick-Service Restaurant Market and Its Customers 2007." These reports stated that the largest group of users for both quick-service and casual dining restaurants are males between the ages of 45 and 64, with household incomes of \$75,000 or more.

And finally, a recent study by Weber Shandwick found that Baby Boomers regularly look to their peers for product recommendations and consider them to be trusted sources of information. In these days of internet-speed information sharing, this is an audience to cultivate and keep satisfied. Adults over age 50 enjoy the convenience that accessible features present, buy products and services for the age spectrum from grandchildren to elderly parents, provide advice that can often make or break sales, and spend an enormous amount of money. Businesses need this market on their side, now and through the time when accessibility for aging Boomers becomes more than a convenience.

While the ADA does not require inclusive commercials, the Department of Justice applauds businesses that consider the whole picture of serving customers with

disabilities: Providing accessibility by voluntarily complying with the ADA means opening up a whole new market for businesses. Reflecting the faces and voices of people with disabilities in print, radio, television, and online ads means reaching out and welcoming this new large and growing audience.

Before I close, I'd like to point out one document in your handouts that I'm especially proud of. "Access for All: Five Years of Progress" chronicles the Department's ADA activities from 2001 to 2006. While the publication focuses on our impressive enforcement work, there is also heavy emphasis on our ADA Technical Assistance program, including the ADA Business Connection and our innovative ADA Mediation Program, as well as our state and local code certification program. I encourage you to take a look at this publication and the other information in your handouts. I hope they will be of interest and of use to you.

I would like to conclude with a quote from IBM Global Business Services: "To stand out in a crowded marketplace, retailers need customer advocates, not just shoppers . . . Becoming more customer focused is a multiyear journey that will require executive sponsorship in order to orchestrate the changes required in culture, organization, processes and technology. It is a vital strategy for all retailers and the means for turning shoppers into advocates and creating a sustainable, differentiated advantage." I hope that after today's meeting, the executives in this room will embrace the cultivation of customer advocates among people with disabilities, Baby Boomers, family, and friends through providing accessibility and marketing it to the world with inclusive, accessible advertising.

Thank you all for coming.