

In the February issue of *Singing Wires*, there was an article "A New Switchboard for the Blind", which referred to a Western Electric design from 1936.

# A SWITCHBOARD FOR BLIND OPERATORS FROM GTE ATEA

Now the  
visually handicapped can operate  
even the biggest private exchange.

- All working keys have tactile as well as light indicators
- An audible signal warns the operators of incoming calls.
- The information on the visual display is repeated on a Braille reading strip.
- All the visual functions are maintained so that a sighted person can take over at any time.

Ask for more information and literature from

**GTE ATEA**

Mercure Centre (near Brussels National Airport)  
Raketstraat 100 1130 Brussels Tel.02/720 7160



ATEA, the Belgian telecom company I worked for, was, from 1926 to 1986, a subsidiary of the American company Automatic Electric of Chicago. Where originally American technology (such as Strowger) was used to design European products, this changed in the 1970s. Given the ever-increasing complexity of telephony, the decision was made to take over American telephone exchanges as a whole and adapt them to international standards.

Thus, the Automatic Electric PABXs such as the GTD 120/1000 were taken over and adapted to what the international market required. For example, many countries needed a blind operator switchboard. After all, the government subsidized companies if they hired blind people as operators.

The American PABX did have an operator, but there was no version adapted for the blind. It was decided to adapt the existing American switchboard for that purpose.

On the switchboard there were a number of buttons on which, when attention was required, a light started to blink. Instead of lamps, an Italian company was found that could supply "tactiles", which could replace the lamps.

A display was also provided, and a Braille display was placed on that interface. See the flyer above.

So instead of "seeing" information, the operator could "feel" the information. There was also an audible signal when an incoming call arrived.