



Well Written Press Releases Can Build Name Recognition and Credibility

By Lisa A. Rozycki



The press release is the most frequently used public relations vehicle, communicating news to the public through trade journals, magazines, newsletters, Internet media/databases, associations and news wire broadcasts, where appropriate. For businesses with limited marketing budgets, a well-written press release can be a great way to get an organization's name in front of hundreds of potential clients and customers. It can also build credibility for an organization in the industries it serves and the local business community.

Before writing a press release, an organization should make sure that what is being written about is newsworthy. Editors aren't likely to be swayed by marketing pitches. If a press release is written like an advertisement, it will end up in the trash and some credibility will be lost with a reporter or publication. Here are a few good reasons for distributing a press release:

- Announcing a merger with or acquisition of another organization
- Announcing events- anniversary celebrations at significant milestones, charitable events, fundraising activities
- Forming a strategic alliance with an organization that provides non-traditional services. Examples of these could include human resource, information technology or financial staffing firms.
- Opening a new office or moving to another location
- Receiving awards or special honors
- Promotions to a supervisory position or a member making Partner
- Releasing findings of an industry survey in a particular niche that you serve

The time, money, and effort an organization invests in personnel, products and services dictates that it achieves optimal coverage for each press release announcement. The message should be targeted to both horizontal markets (publications that reach a broad audience) and vertical markets (publications that serve a particular industry or service niche). A database of media contacts should be compiled and maintained on a regular basis. Relevant publications can be found at the local library or through online research. The release should be targeted to the appropriate editor. If unsure, call the publication and ask.

There are some basic formatting guidelines for writing a press release:

- "For immediate release" should be written at the top
- One or two contact persons should be listed next with phone numbers and email addresses in case the editor or reporter has a question.
- An attention-grabbing headline should be written to attract the reader into the substance of the release.
- The body of the release should start with the city you are located in and the date of the release. If you are sending the announcement ahead of the official release of the news, you should put "to be released January 1," for example.

A release should start off with a strong lead that includes the 5 W's--who, what, when, where, and why in the opening paragraph. Sometimes the "how" is also relevant. Editors read thousands of press releases and need to be able to evaluate your press release for newsworthiness in the first few paragraphs.

Press releases should be typewritten and double-spaced using one side of a sheet of paper. Include -more- at the bottom of the first page and -add one- on the top, right hand corner of the second page. A press release should be no more than two pages and should end with -30- or ###, signaling the end of the release.

With technology changing rapidly, there are more ways than the traditional postal mail method to issue a press release. Press releases can be sent by broadcast fax, e-mail, and newswire, for example. When emailing a press release, copy the release into the body of the email. If a reporter cannot open a release as an attachment, he or she will more than likely delete the email.

When the press release does make it into publication, call or write the editor or reporter who published it to thank them. They are so used to hearing complaints, a thank you will go a long way towards building a good relationship with them.

Make the most out of the published press release. Ask for reprints to use in promotions or to show to clients. Send reprints to people you are hoping to influence. Publish news articles on the firm's web site but be sure to ask permission from the publication first.

Of course, many organizations hire a public relations firm to perform many if not all aspects of public relations from writing the release to sending it to reporters. If you are going to do it yourself, think like a reporter and send press releases on news that you would personally like to read yourself.

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