

## Writing - a Press Release

Press coverage and media attention can be more effective than any other type of advertising, and a well-written and well-received press release can garner great rewards for your company. Press releases, also referred to as news releases, are a staple of any public relations effort. Writing them is simply another way of writing news stories; therefore, the same tenets that govern the rules and standards of journalism must be employed.

It is hugely important that your release is written to not only get an editor's attention, but also to communicate as many facts as possible in an exciting and interesting way. Editors read press releases quickly and with a well-trained eye. Should they not find what they are looking for within the first paragraph of your release, they are more likely to discard it altogether.

The more effectively and coherently a release is written, the better its chances of getting picked up by a journalist or an editor and turned into a full story. After all, newsworthy events do not happen every day, and your company deserves to receive the best coverage possible. A well-written and well-structured press release can help your company do just that.

The steps below will help you become an expert at creating a professional-looking press release.

### Step 1: Establish that it's a Newsworthy Event

The most important element of the release is the vitally important fact that it is announcing something about your company. What, then, is a newsworthy event? A newsworthy event can encompass one or more of the following types of situation: \* New Product (announced, available, shipped, etc.) \* A major new customer or significant partnership or alliance \* Corporate, or "C" Level, activities or changes (hirings, promotions, reassignments, leavings, retirements) \* Significant changes in company structures (large hirings, layoffs or re-organizations) \* Facility changes \* Updates in technologies \* Earnings statements or guidance \* Exceptionally good or unusual news, such as a company winning an award \* Other newsworthy events

As it is not unheard of for certain editors to receive over 1 thousand releases per day, make certain the event you're publicizing is truly something that will grab any reader's attention. Your press release is not substantially different from any other news article. Before you even begin to set paper to pen, ask yourself carefully, "Is this something that I would want to read about?" Chances are if you don't want to read about it, then neither will anyone else.

### Step 2. Identify the Main Elements: Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How

Now that you have determined the newsworthy topic of your release, before you begin to write word one, write down the six words listed above.

Often referred to in the PR industry as "The 5 W's and the H," these elements will serve as the cornerstone of your press release. From these elements, you can build your headline and the body of your release. While this information needs to appear throughout the release, many editors will want to be able to answer these questions just from the information that appears in the headline and the opening paragraph of the release.

### Step 3. Know Your Audience

Think about which editors and writers will be interested in your release. Avoid using too much technical industry jargon --any confusion of these terms will only serve to alienate a reader that isn't familiar with them.

You can increase your chances of getting picked up by focusing on media that covers your type of news. Focus on editors and writers that specialize in your industry.

### Step 4. "Grab" the Reader with the Headline

Another oft-used journalistic term, the opening headline and paragraph should be written to literally 'grab' the reader's attention. The headline is what will make your release stand out. As you are writing it, picture in your mind exactly how you would want the headline to appear in a newspaper. The headline needs to be written so that it is equally as alluring as it is informative.

The opening paragraph needs to contain the most vital information. For example, if your release is serving as a product announcement, the very first paragraph should include the price, availability/shipping date, and beta site or customer reference for comment (if available.)

If the press release is announcing an important company event, the opening paragraph should include the location, date, any fees that are associated with the event, and any features of the event that make it unique and important, such as a roster of speakers. Again, follow the course of the 5 W's -- anyone reading the first paragraph and the headline of your release should be able to identify these easily.

### Step 5. Organize Your Information

Make sure that all the information that you present is organized from most important to least important. While, as previously discussed, the most important information should appear in the opening paragraph, make sure that the information presented in the following paragraphs is still pertinent to your topic and your objective.

### Step 6. Be Accurate

Stick to the facts and avoid making flowery and subjective statements. At all costs, avoid statements of belief unless they can be substantiated ("the cheapest," "the most successful," etc.). Superlatives, ("best in the industry," "the strongest made," "most widely used") should be avoided and used ONLY if they can be proven. The superlative, if true, is excellent fodder for the opening paragraph, or even the headline.

### Step 7. Stick to the Facts

Try and be as concise as possible. Remember, in this case, it may often be true that less is more. Stay away from HYPE and stick with the facts. Unfounded statements will only cast a shadow of doubt on the release itself and any information that you as a writer might present in the future. Also, avoid

creating laundry lists of every single accomplishment that your company has ever made and stick to the current news only.

#### Step 8. Include Quotes

Support your assertions with quotes from analysts, customers (especially if the release is product related) and executives from your company. Quotes can help make a release exciting, while also substantiating the information that release is conveying. The quotes need to be approved by the person that said them and in some cases also by a lawyer or your legal department.

#### Step 9. Include a Background

Include all details about the news and any implications it will have on your industry or the world as a whole. If possible, try to include some industry history in order to give the news some context. Try and explain how this event compares to others in the field. Provide as much information as anyone would need to understand your news. Show what the benefits are. Imagine that someone from the general public is reading your release in the newspaper. The more self-contained your release is, the better; the more easily a writer can create a story directly from your release, the better its chances of getting published.

#### Step 10. Finish with a Corporate Summary

Include a short corporate summary at the end. It need not be longer than three to six lines, and should also include full company name and headquarters location.

#### Step 11. Provide Contact Information

A name, phone number, and preferably an e-mail address of an internal PR contact or a PR contact at an external agency should be provided. This must be a person who is extremely knowledgeable about the topic and readily available to answer the phone.

#### Other Tips

\*Proofreading: Spell check the release and have several people look it over before you submit it.

Typographical and spelling errors will cast doubt on you as a reliable source.

\*Tone: When you are done, reread the release and think about the goals and objectives you are trying to achieve with the release. Are you merely trying to disseminate information, or are you trying to increase sales? This should be reflected in the tone.

#### And Finally?

Don't get discouraged if your release isn't picked up immediately or if it takes several releases until you finally get the coverage you want. It may take a lot of time and persistence to make the news. Send press releases regularly, monthly or even weekly.

Do take advantage of it when your press release makes it into a publication (including Web sites.) Ask for reprints for your press kit or to show your customers. Use quotations from the articles in your company literature.