

Press Release Suggestion

Ten Tips to Writing a News Release

1. Audience: Write with your audience's needs in mind, that is, like a news story without all the filler.
2. Use a snappy, yet informative, headline. A few words here can save a lot of space.
3. An equally clever lead, an opening sentence that both catches the attention and informs the reader at the same time.
4. Give all the important information up front. Your first two sentences should contain the who, what, where, when and why stuff.
5. Only include useful information. Don't include boilerplate, jargon or 'political' things that aren't crucial to the meaning of the release. Your release is for the media, not to pat yourself on the back.
6. Check your sources. If you have to, ask your sources to make sure your words are accurate. Do not give them the power to veto!
7. Don't sound radical, even if you are. Sound authoritative. Nobody takes extremists seriously, that's why they blow things up and chain themselves to trees.
8. Speak in 'plain English'. Speak in simple phrases and avoid, at all costs, jargon of any kind. The words may mean something to you or your field, but that is not who this press release is for.
9. Make up interesting quotes. Spruce up the words of your colleagues. This is legal: you're not a reporter!
10. You'll never get it right the first time. Get someone else to proof read and edit it.

Types of News Releases

- **Hard News Release:** A straight news story, such as an announcement, of personnel changes (major), a new grant, an important new study or benefit event.
- **Feature Release:** A human interest look at what your organization is up to.
- **Back grounder:** Provides explanatory information about your organization, a *Fact Sheet* helps to do this information sharing to media types or outsiders. Similar but less concern with issues than the facts, i.e. names, dates and places.
- **Q & A:** A quick way to answer frequently asked questions about specific issues, i.e. Y2K, child healthcare, aims of your organization's policy. Good to make available on your web page or web site on the Internet.
- **Biographies:** Provides data of interest on key people in your organization, i.e. background, expertise and achievements.
- **Media Advisories:** A news alert to invite the media to attend an event. Not to be written for publication, but to give the media the what, where, when and who things they need to know.

A Few Tips for Press Events

- Make sure it is worth holding an event for!
- Make sure it starts on time.
- Make sure the reporters know it ahead of time.
- Make sure the reporters are well fed and have a place where they can gather.
- Make sure all equipment works before you begin (mic, PA, PowerPoint . . .)
- Make sure you've had plenty of caffeine, because it can become a long day.
- Make sure follow-up calls to all reporters that have attended. *Thank You's* are a good affirmation.

Care and Feeding Your News Contacts

Nurture ‘em – Build a relationship with reporters, editors and producers. Let them come to know that you are a reliable source of information. Give them a news tip from outside your organization. Learn what sort of news they want to know, so you can avoid wasting their time.

Educate ‘em – Let them know who you are, what your organization is about and what your programs are about.

Tell ‘em the Truth – Don’t lie to a reporter. It will come back to haunt you. Also, don’t give them estimates, give them exact figures – even if they ask for a rough guess.

Feed ‘em – Take them out to lunch. Provide food at press functions and let them know that it is going to be there.

Do their work for ‘em – Don’t make them need to tease information out of you. Anticipate their questions. News people are busy people. The information that you communicate to them for a press release (or a conversation) needs to be clear and concise. If they can lift your words, verbatim, out of a release, then you’re doing a fine job.

Send ‘em in the right direction – Spin is something politicians do for their stories, especially when things are not going well! You want to provide an angle for your reporters to get a good story. Let them know the significance of what you’re asking them to write about.

Give ‘em something to play with – Why give them a business card when you can give them an event! Create a promotional object, a toy or something that can sit on their desk and remind them of you (i.e. mouse pad with your organization’s name on it). Make it appropriate to your organization. Get creative! For example, you represent a hospital, so give them a plastic 8” skeleton with your name and contact information on the base. Give them something they’ll remember you with.

More Info on PR from the following:

Public Relations Practices: Managerial Case Studies & Problems by Allen Center & Frank Walsh is your basic textbook with plenty of case studies.

Public Relations Handbook by Philip Lesly covers just about everything in 900 pages.

A Guide to Successful Public Relations by Colin Hayes; interesting reading.

Promotion Issues & Ideas: A Guide to PR for Nonprofit Organizations by M. Booth and Associates, Inc. which covers everything!

Pitching the Story

Before you even attempt to contact a member of the media, find out the kind of information they want and how they want the information delivered. The standard of the field is the Bacon's Print and Broadcast Directories. Updated a few times a year, they contain the names and contact information of every reporter, magazine, newspaper, TV and radio station in the country. Very expensive, so you should borrow somebody else's copy and write down what you need (i.e. library).

Can't stress enough: be respectful of their needs, these people are doing you a favor. You want them to remember that working with you was a good experience.

Cold Call: Prepare what you're going to say ahead of time and stick to your script.

Targeted Hit: Develop a story with a particular person/newspaper/TV station in mind.

Broadcast FAX: Send out a barrage of press releases to a number of different people at a single time via the FAX machine. Make sure that you aim for the right people first.

Broadcast Software: Some companies/organizations have elaborate and expensive software systems that manage all this media-contact information for you.

Email: Some reporters prefer email, some will never check it. Make sure you know which of the two you are sending email to.

Follow-up: Always make a quick phone call to make sure they got you fax/letter/email. A good way of faking it if you forgot them earlier: What? You didn't get my FAX . . . those dang things!")

The Newswire: A shotgun approach. You send them your press release and they make sure their subscribers get the news.