

Creating Effective Press Releases in a Web 2.0 World

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Press Releases in a Web 2.0 World

The press release has been doing the “grunt work” of public relations almost from the very beginning. Although from time-to-time it has been declared dead and obsolete, the press release continues to play an important role in helping organizations achieve a favorable image in the marketplace. More importantly, its role as a sales and traffic generator has continued to gain favor.

What accounts for this new role is, simply, the Web. More specifically, what we now call Web 2.0 -- all those social networking tools that allow customers and prospects to interact with the Web.

In this report, we are going to focus on two main topics:

- 1) How to write the traditional press release. After all, you want to get the basics down pat so that you can use your releases in the traditional way, i.e. distributing them to targeted news outlets.
- 2) How to take the press release to the next level and make it a hard-working tool in your Web 2.0 marketing.

Let's take a look at some of the basics of press release writing.

The Basics: Writing A Press Release

The press release is the most basic technique of public relations.

What is public relations? In very general terms, public relations helps to identify your business to potential customers, to demonstrate your knowledge and credibility as a businessperson and ultimately, to attract customers and “grow” your business.

The press release is a simple, written statement that tells an editor the basic information about a topic of potential public interest by answering the questions WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, WHY, or HOW.

A press release can be used whenever a person or institution is going to SAY or DO something some segment of the community may be interest in.

Press releases serve four basic purposes:

— To provide an editor with a news story (i.e. “Frank Marafiotte Elected President of Internet Writers Association”).

- To induce an editor to cover and report on a future news making event (i.e. Smith to Address Chamber on “The Identity Theft”).
- To interest an editor in developing a newspaper feature story that will cover a topic in detail (i.e. Consulting Firm Says Economy Ready to Boom).
- To serve as an informational resource on the Web for editors, customers, and other groups that have an interest in your company, your industry, or you personally.

These simple guidelines will help make sure that your press releases do the job they’re supposed to — and that’s get into print, on the air, or on the Web.

1. In the traditional news release, five points make the story in every news release: WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN, WHY (sometimes) and HOW (a possible sixth point).
2. The first paragraph of a press release is called the “lead” paragraph. It should be written to capture and hold the attention of the reader (and editor).
3. Press release stories should be stated as succinctly and to-the-point as possible.
4. Identify each person mentioned in a release by full name.
5. For typed and printed press releases, use white bond paper, double spaced, using one side of the paper. If the story takes more than one page, end the first with a complete paragraph and write “MORE” at the bottom of the page. Indicate the end of the story by writing “# # #” or “- 30 -”.
6. Write your name, address and business and business or home telephone numbers in the upper right-hand corner of the page. Then, if the editor wants more information, he or she can get in touch with you.
7. Be sure to indicate the release date of the story. This appears in the upper left-hand corner and may be written:

FOR RELEASE ON JANUARY 1 -- or

FOR RELEASE ON OR AFTER JANUARY 1 - or

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Include the date the release was actually written at the bottom of the page.

Some Tips to Follow

1. Get news releases to the editor as early as you can -- a week in advance, if possible.
2. Typewrite all copy double-spaced on bond paper, using one side only. Leave ample margins.
3. Put the name of your company, and your own name, address and business and home telephone numbers at the top of each release.
4. Give all the facts. . .the what, when, where, who and why of your event. Be sure to give specific release date of the story.
5. Don't try to use free newspaper space to advertise any commercial service.
6. Don't threaten or pull rank in an attempt to get newspaper space. A good presentation will stand on its own merits.
7. Don't omit essential information. Check over your copy to be sure it tells the who, what, why, when and where, and include your name, address and telephone number at the top.
8. Don't bother with trivialities, superlatives and over enthusiasm. Omit adjectives and avoid nicknames.

Working With Editors

1. Never send a story to an editor unless it is newsworthy.
2. Get to know the editors and reporters personally.
3. Don't play favorites. Make sure each newspaper has the same news story.
4. If an editor uses your story, she has done so because it contained newsworthy material. There is no need for thanks.
5. Never ask an editor to run a story as a favor to you.
6. If you have promised an exclusive story to an editor, don't also provide or "leak" the story to other editors.
7. Treat the press fairly; if you promised an editor a story by a certain time, have it ready for him by then.
8. If an editor calls you after he has your release, provide him with the answers to his questions quickly and completely so he can complete the story.

9. Don't be overly dismayed or call the editor to complain if she didn't use your story in its entirety or at all — sometimes space, time limitations or reshuffled feature schedules can cause this.
10. If an error appears in your published story, call the appropriate editor right away and he will usually try to correct it.

Tips for Getting Your Story Used

Many publicity stories distributed to the press end up in the wastebasket or the email trash folder. The good ones get used as received or they may be rewritten by the editor. . .but they do appear.

To help get your story used, make sure:

1. That your story contains something of local interest.
2. That there is enough substantial material to make it newsworthy.
3. That it is timely.
4. That it is not disguised advertising.
5. That the story contains no factual inaccuracies.
6. That it does not duplicate an earlier release.
7. That you or a responsible individual are available to provide other key facts after the editor has received the article.
8. That your story reaches the appropriate editor at a particular news medium — usually the business editor.

Adapting the Press Release to Web 2.0

As the Web was becoming more important as a source of news and information, many PR professionals had started to think of the press release as an anachronism — a relic of a bygone era in public relations.

What we have learned, however, is that the press release — particularly social media releases — are preferred by a growing number of journalists. That is especially true for younger journalists regardless of media, and certainly all journalists in new media.

What do we mean by social media?

Social media allow people to use text, audio and video to share information, ideas and opinions, such as blogs, podcasts and message boards. Social media releases are

news releases that incorporate and utilize properties of social media.

The degree of “social” in a news release can vary considerably. One example would be the company that uses the traditional news release, but which also has a media room on its Web sites where press releases can be posted. The releases themselves often contain links to other Web sites and resources.

The next time you distribute a press release via email, don’t send the release and images as attachments, but include thumbnail sketches that link to high resolution downloadable images and links to background information from both your organization and third parties to help reporters gather more information. Consider using an email service that allow you to track who received and opened your email, and which links they clicked on.

Include links to third-party sources. It not only makes life easier for reporters, it increases the credibility of your press release. Moreover, if it is a controversial story, those links help you to control the debate over the issue that is the subject of the release.

If you are feeling adventuresome and work in an industry where rule-breaking is welcome, consider a social media release format in which the basic facts are presented up front as bullet points. They are then supported with links to photos, videos, podcasts, videos and other Web resources. Following that, there might be a series of quotes from company leaders, customers, and industry experts. Finally, at the very end add your standard press release.

Optimizing Your Press Release for the Web

Although your first target for a press release is likely to be an editor or series of editors, there is an even more important audience to consider: your sales prospects. A Web site is often a company’s largest source of sales prospects and leads. You can use your press release to assist sales by driving people to your Web site. Once you get them there, it’s then up to you to convert them into potential sales.

Here are some tried-and-true Web 2.0 techniques –

Use the Search engines. You can use PR wire services to automatically place your press releases on the most popular search engines such as Yahoo!, Google, AOL and other country—specific portals.

Use Search Engine Optimization (SEO). You can’t have a successful Web site unless you optimize its copy for search engines. The same goes for online press releases. Try to include no more than two relevant search terms per release. You should include one of the terms in the title. The title should be between seven to 10 words with an imperative verb.

The sales results can be impressive. Southwest Airlines used SEO in four press releases and sold \$1.5 million in tickets in 90 days that was directly traceable to links in the press releases.

Use embedded links. Some wire services let you include embedded links in your online press releases for as little as \$50 per release. You can automatically embed links to your Web site's home page and to any product pages referenced in the release. This mimics how online readers find and search for information on a Web page. Plus, you have control over where in your Web site you want them to visit. If you have the capabilities, you can also measure if there are any spikes in traffic on any of the Web pages you referenced — proving the effectiveness of your release.

Use bloggers. Many reports read blogs for story ideas and trends. Providing an online version of your press release gives bloggers opportunities to link to your content.

Create an online newsroom. Over time as you continue to write press releases, you will need a place to make them conveniently available to reporters, prospects, customers and others. By creating an online newsroom, you will have a place to showcase your releases. For many companies, their newsroom is one of the most frequently visited pages on their Web site.

Thank You for Reading Our Special Report!

Thank you for reading this report. I hope you found it helpful. Now it is time to roll up your sleeves and start generating some positive PR for you and your business.

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