

Let's get noticed!



An often over-looked form of communication is public relations activity and this can be an inexpensive but powerful way of raising your profile. PR is a wide-ranging topic but in this article Andrew Chalk concentrates on how to write and issue a press release.

What's the objective?

Whatever you do in business there should be an objective and writing a press release is no exception. What are you trying to achieve with your release; to inform potential clients, to change opinions, to offer an industry perspective on a topical issue?

Who is your audience?

To whom are you targeting your release? What media do they consume? Remember - a good story does not only have to appear in the news press, you could also try radio, TV or trade magazines for example.

Target Media

Choose the media you will use to distribute your message through. The media is the conduit for your message and they will only use it if it has direct relevance to them and their readers. Speak to the editor or newsdesk and find out what they want from a release.

Get the message right

It is important that your release has relevance to your target audience and is written in the journalistic style of the media chosen.

Tailor your message

Make sure you tailor your release in order to ensure relevance to that publication, for example local press need a local angle.

Timing

Is the timing of your release critical? Check the editorial calendars and see what journalists will be writing about and dovetail your release so it has real relevance. Remember though, that yesterday's news is just that.

Get the format right. Follow these simple guidelines:

Heading - Should be short and punchy and sum up the release. Avoid puns.

First Paragraph - The first paragraph should be a summary of the story. It should be so self-explanatory that it could be used in isolation and still convey your message.

Keep it factual - do not embellish anything.

Tone of voice - always write in the third person and always write in the style of the chosen media.

Grammar - make sure your grammar is correct and check your spelling too.

Jargon - avoid it. Make sure your readers will understand what you are saying.

Sentence structure - clear, short sentences work best.

It's a story - so don't try and make it an advert.

Double check - make sure you double check your release, especially facts and sources. Better still get someone else to check it as well.

Quotes - add interest to your release with a quotation from someone relevant to the article, a customer perhaps. You can always include a quote from someone in your business as well.

Pictures - Given that most of us think in pictures and that most media is visually driven a picture is very important. But it must be relevant and should not be an obvious advertisement.

Format - make sure your release is double spaced and is prepared in plain text with no underlining, italics or other embellishments.

So what? - apply the "so what?" test - be intensely critical, is this really of interest?

The End - a minor point, but always put the word "ENDS" at the end of the release so the length of the release is absolutely obvious.

Notes for Editors - at the end of your copy add any explanatory notes to help the journalist. If you include a picture make sure the suggested caption is detailed here too.

Contacts - include your full contact details so that journalists can get in touch for further information or clarification.

Most print media as well as TV and radio prefer releases to be sent as an email, not as an attachment. In the subject line of your email you should state "Press Release" followed by the heading of your release. Then just copy and paste your release into the body of the email without any introductory or explanatory text. In this way the copy can be simply lifted and edited.

Don't forget that although some print media make a charge for including pictures, on the whole press releases that are used do not cost you anything. Of course they may be edited into small filler releases, or if you are really lucky and have caught the imagination they may be expanded and become more of a feature.

My final tip - why not add any release you write to a news section of your own website whether it has been published or not?