
How to write an effective press release.

There is a nasty rumor that press releases don't work. Not true! Press releases can be a fabulous tool for business promotion ... IF they are properly written and presented. A problem occurs because most people are not aware of the special requirements of press releases. A press release is not a page-long advertisement. A press release is not a novel. A press release is not a tell-all promotional piece that is full of detail. So what IS a press release and how do you write one that will actually get placed?

Change your target-audience.

The first mistake commonly made is writing a press release with your business target audience in mind. Unlike advertising copy, which is written to appeal to your customer, a press release is written to appeal to a journalist.

The journalist is not someone who is seeking to buy your product or service. A journalist is looking to fill a news need. When writing a press release, you must meet that need by filling the reporter's requirements.

Rather than answering the question, "What's in it for me", answer the question, "Why would ABC magazine's readers care"? The headline also takes on a new focus. Rather than using a headline proclaiming the benefits of your product, use a headline that proclaims its newsworthiness.

Do your homework.

One common error is submitting a press release without first reading the publication. It is virtually impossible to provide timely, news-oriented information to a site or magazine if you have no idea what interests their readers have.

Do a little homework before submitting. Visit the Web and look at the stories the site offers. Buy a copy of the magazine or newspaper and review the common interests of its readers. By understanding what the publication is looking for, you will be

able to fulfill the need and thus get a much better response from your press release.

Don't call us. We'll call you.

The biggest irritant reporters have is receiving calls from writers asking if the press release was received. Worse yet, is asking if it was read. Journalists are very busy people. They get hundreds of press releases a day. I have actually heard reporters say that they throw away the releases of those people who call them.

Resist the urge to phone. Once you submit your press release, rest assured you will be contacted if there is an interest.

Place it into the right hands.

Just like advertisements, press releases must be placed in strategic areas. Search the Web for outlets to run your release. A few I have gotten good response from are:

- <http://www.businesswire.com>
- <http://www.internet.com>
- <http://www.prnewswire.com>

Also, email your release to the appropriate person at individual magazines, newspapers and Web sites. Target those that would be read by your customers. Be sure to find the correct name and email address for the reporter who handles stories related to your business. Releases that are sent to incorrect contacts are most likely thrown away... not forwarded on to someone else.

KISS

Keep it short silly! Press releases are not meant to tell the whole story. They are meant to give the reporter an idea of what's happening in your business that their readers need to know about. If the journalist would like additional information or would like to arrange for an interview, he/she will call. Press releases should be approximately 400 words - 500 maximum.

I know all this sounds like a list of nit-picky rules. Not really. Just like with advertising copy, you must give your reader what he needs. Write a newsworthy release that meets the criteria of the reporter and his/her subscribers. The time you take to do so will pay off. As you know - when you fill a need, you get results.

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