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GUIDE TO PRESS RELEASES

How to Write a Press Release that Gets Results

There's no secret to writing a powerful press release. Maybe you've written a release before but didn't get the results you expected. Maybe you've never written a release and you're not sure where to start. Whatever the case, this guide will help prepare you for the task ahead by walking you through the following.

- What press releases are and what they're for.
- The style guidelines you'll need to follow to get the most out of your release.
- How to write each section of the release (headline, summary, body, and boiler-plate) for maximum effect.

A press release is simply the sum of its parts. To write a good press release, you just need to include the right elements and organize them in the right way.

Press Release Basics

What are press releases, and how can they help your business? Before we get into the gritty details, let's answer a few basic questions about the nature of press releases and what they're for.

What is a press release?

A press release is a brief message of about 400 to 600 words sent specifically to members of the media—news sites, journalists, bloggers, newspapers, news aggregators, and so on—that draws attention to a newsworthy event or occurrence. Any message sent deliberately by a member of the general public to a member of the media can be considered a press release.

How these messages are supplied to the media, as well as how they are written and formatted, has evolved over the years. Today, most press releases are distributed online, via email, RSS feeds, and newswire services. There are a number of press release distribution companies, including Vocus, BusinessWire, PR NewsWire, MarketWired, and others, all of which boast various proprietary distribution methods and recipient lists.

Why are press releases important?

Press releases give your company a voice, a way of reaching out to the media and gaining exposure for your company. The press release is an accepted and expected format for providing the media with newsworthy information that pertains to your company. Unless you have a network of connections in the media industry, you'll probably need to rely on press releases as your primary method of gaining media coverage.

What do press releases achieve for your business?

A press release can benefit your business in three ways.

1. The release can get "picked up" and posted on news websites, added to RSS feeds, linked to in blog posts and other articles, and receive general exposure on the internet.

2. The release can be seen by journalists, editors, and other media professionals, who may find it interesting enough to write a more detailed article or story about your company.

3. The release can get indexed by search engines wherever it has been posted, helping boost your website's authority and rank in search results.

For these reasons, press releases are an important part of any online marketing strategy.

Getting the Most Out of Your Press Release

It's easy to write a weak, ineffective press release. It's even easier to distribute that release and get nothing out of it—few pickups, a miniscule bump in traffic, no media attention whatsoever. This happens all the time. Why does it happen, and how can you keep it from happening to you?

To get the most out of your press release, keep these guidelines in mind when writing and releasing it.

1. **Make it newsworthy.** Your release should contain information that is interesting, relevant, valuable, and timely. If it doesn't, readers and the media will ignore it. Easier said than done. This is actually the hardest part of writing a press release.

   Let's take a look at a few press release topics that the media *won't* consider newsworthy.

   • A general introduction to your business, talking about who you are and what you do. Sorry, **not newsworthy.**
   • A breakdown of some of the features of your most popular products. Nope, **not newsworthy.**
   • An analysis of why your services are better than your competitors' services. Still probably **not newsworthy.**

   Press releases aren't meant to be promotional. Journalists and media professionals don't care about your company. They want *news.* Their goal is to find and publish information that's of interest to their audience. Simply copying and pasting the "About" page from your website won't cut it.

   Here are a few *good* topic ideas. Notice that they're all related to a specific newsworthy event or situation.

   • The grand opening of a new restaurant. This is **newsworthy.** Why? Because people want to know when new restaurants open in their community, so it makes sense for the media to cover these stories.
   • The announcement of an award your business has received. **Newsworthy.** Why? Because industry professionals, vendors, partners, and customers want to know about companies that receive special public recognition. Even your competitors will want to know. This is useful information.

- An analysis of a current news topic that relates to your company, your products, or your services. This is **newsworthy,** usually. As an example, suppose you manufacture GPS devices, and your products are used to help track down a lost hiker in the mountains. The media may want to know your company's take on this news story.
- The achievement of a specific milestone of public significance. **Newsworthy!** Let's say you buy and sell used electronics, and you recycle old equipment that can't be salvaged or sold. Announcing that your company has just recycled its 1,000th computer monitor is very newsworthy, because it shows how your work affects the health of your community.

There are many other possibilities. Keep in mind that you don't necessarily have to write for the general public—in fact, most businesses probably shouldn't. But write with an audience in mind, even if that audience is simply other professionals in your industry, and develop a newsworthy topic.

2. **Write in an objective, journalistic tone.** Your goal with a news release is to convince journalists and media sites that your topic is important enough to be featured as news. To do this, you need to make it easy for them to see your topic as a news story. The best way to do this is to write it like one.

   Keep your tone objective and professional, refer to yourself and your company in the third person, and cite any subjective claims you make. Don't write, "We're proud to announce the grand opening of our new restaurant!" Instead, write "Tom's Awesome Burgers, LLC, today announced the launch of a new bar and grill in downtown Milwaukee."

3. **Put the most important information first.** Your readers, whether they're members of the media or the general public, will want to know what your release is about right from the start. They won't read past the first sentence if it doesn't hook them or inform them that the release is interesting, relevant, valuable, or timely. Start strong.

4. **Write for people, not search engines.** This should go without saying, but because press releases do provide some SEO benefit, many business owners stuff keywords and links everywhere they can, hoping to get as much search value as possible. Don't do this. If you write like this, you're not going to attract any media attention, and search engines will most likely flag your release as spam. Write for readers first and foremost.

Here are a few pointers on how to do this.

- Don't try to distribute ads, personal opinions, spam, or anything like that. This content won't get you very far, if it's even cleared for distribution at all, and no one will want to read it.
- Don't include too many links. Just two or three, at most. As a rule, if you need to link to more than two or three other pages, your release is probably not focused enough. Narrow down your topic.
- Don't stuff links with keywords. Contrary to what you may have heard, Google now considers press release links with keyword-rich anchor text suspicious. The best anchor text for a link is your business name, or the specific name of a product or service you provide.

5. **Maintain an appropriate length—300 to 800 words.** This is one of the basic structural guidelines that has emerged over the years. You should strive to give as much detail as needed without going overboard. There is no "best" word count for a release, but in general, 400 words is good.

6. **Include multimedia as often as possible.** Photos, videos, logos, files, and other supporting media give journalists and news editors more to work with, making your release more valuable. These additions are also of interest to general readers, and can increase reader time on page by an average of 30 seconds, getting you more exposure. If you include a video, keep it short—less than two minutes.

7. **Don't copy the exact text of the release to use as a post on your blog.** There are two problems with this. First, remember that press releases are written objectively, in a third-person voice. This is the exact opposite of the tone most companies use on their blogs. It will sound stuffy and jarring to your readers. Second, copying the press release content word-for-word could potentially get your site penalized by Google for hosting duplicated content. Remember, the press release has already been picked up all over the web—Google isn't going to index it and rank it again. Rewrite the release in a more informal tone to use on your blog, and you'll avoid both of these potential issues.

8. **Share the link to the release on social media.** Start by posting the link to the release itself, hosted by the press release distribution company. This establishes the legitimacy of the release. After a day or two, once you've had a chance to rewrite the release and post it on your blog, start sharing the link to your blog post.

How to Write a Press Release

A press release can be broken down into four parts.

- **HEADLINE**
- **SUMMARY**
- **BODY**
- **BOILERPLATE**

Let's take a look at how to write each part.

HEADLINE

The headline is the first thing your readers see, and in many cases, it's the only thing they'll read, making it the most important part of your press release. Everything hinges on your headline. But media professionals and consumers alike see hundreds of head-lines every day. How can you ensure your press release gets attention?

That depends. What goal do you want your headline to accomplish?

- Do you want to hook readers and convince them to read further?
- Do you want to announce the main point of the release in a way that makes the mes-sage clear, whether the viewer keeps reading or not?

Your headline can do one or the other, but not both. Before you can write a strong headline, you'll need to decide which approach to take.

The first option works best when you're primarily interested in connecting with general readers. You'll probably get more clicks and page views this way. You'll most likely see a larger spike in traffic. You might even get more media attention as well, since media sites like stories that drive traffic. At first glance, this option seems like the way to go.

But can you deliver on the promise of your hook? If you're writing a press release to announce the grand opening of your new downtown bar and grill, is a hook appropriate? If your company has won an important industry award, should you try to come up with a gimmicky hook to draw people in? Or is it more important to get the word out to as many people as possible, as quickly as possible?

The second option is arguably more practical and better suited to the examples men-tioned above. Not everyone is going to read your press release. But this doesn't have to mean that you've failed. If you make your point in the headline itself, you'll reach even the "skimmers" who choose not to read on.

For example, if you're announcing the opening of your new downtown bar and grill, what you really want is for everyone in the neighborhood to know that Tom's Awesome Burgers is now open for business, and that it's located downtown. The headline, if written properly, can communicate all of this quickly and clearly, expanding the reach of your message.

Writing an Effective Headline
There's an art to writing good headlines. It's not something that can be taught in a single article—if it were, everyone would be writing perfect headlines all the time. Still, there are a few basic techniques that can help you write a strong headline. Keep the following tips in mind.

1. **Write the headline first, before you write anything else.** Your headline will shape the rest of the release. If you write the release first and then try to come up with a headline, the end result may not be as focused and cohesive as it should be.

2. **Keep it short.** Make your headline clear, brief, and easy to understand. Some experts say your headline shouldn't be longer than 7 words. This is probably a bit too extreme, but shorter is definitely better.

3. **Make sure it's meaningful.** Will the headline make sense to your audience? Many "hook" headlines end up saying nothing at all in an attempt to entice readers to keep reading. Don't fall into this trap.

4. **Avoid spam words.** Using words like "free," "order now," "sex," "buy," "make money," and others in a headline may get your release flagged as spam by email filters and other content filters, making it more difficult to share via email and social media.

5. **Avoid verbs like "is," "are," "be," and "was."** Use active verbs.

6. **Be as specific as possible.** This is especially important for "announcement" headlines. Include specific numbers, locations, and other critical information as needed. Don't write, "Restaurant Chain Helps Boost Local Economy." Instead, write, "Tom's Awesome Burgers Creates 30 Jobs in Downtown Milwaukee."

7. **Your headline should make a promise.** If your goal is to hook readers, your headline must promise to make readers smarter, happier, or better in some way if they read it. Focus on benefits. How will the information in your press release benefit your readers?

How to Structure Your Headline

Announcement headlines are often straightforward. Take a look at some of these examples.

- **Ben's Asphalt Wins Orange County Business Journal's Family Owned Business Award**
- **The Riders Club Celebrates Second Anniversary in June**
- **Blazonco Announces Strategic Partnership with Palo Alto Software**

By contrast, "hook" headlines are a bit more complex and must be carefully crafted for maximum impact. You can save time by looking at what's worked in the past. To hook readers and communicate your release's promised benefits, start with any of the following headline structures and tweak it to fit your message.

- **How To -** "How to Increase Sales by Removing Your Website's Contact Form"
- **List -** "5 Minor Website Changes to Increase Page Views"
- **Secret -** "The Secret to Getting More Customers Without Spending More Money"
- **Little Known -** "Little Known Ways to Boost Website Traffic"
- **Quick and Simple -** "Quick and Simple Ways to Boost Website Traffic in 2014"
- **What You Should Know** - "What You Should Know About DIY Website Scams"
- **No Challenge -** "You Don't Have to Know HTML to Redesign Your Website"

SUMMARY

The summary is a brief paragraph, usually no more than one or two sentences long, that provides context for the headline. Let's start with an example.

- **Headline:** How to Increase Sales by Removing Your Website's Contact Form
- **Summary:** New research shows website contact forms generate fewer conversions than click-to-call phone numbers.

The summary expands on the topic presented in the headline by telling the reader what kind of information is included in the body of the release. Notice that the summary isn't much longer than the headline. A single sentence is often sufficient.

For announcement press releases, your summary should immediately present the relevant information concerning your company and the topic of the release—who, what, when, where, and why.

- **Headline:** Tom's Awesome Burgers Creates 30 Jobs in Downtown Milwaukee
- **Summary:** New bar and grill at Cathedral Square hiring 3 chefs and 27 support staff for grand opening in June.

You'll notice this summary, though short, contains a who, a what, a when, a where, and a why. Read it again. "New bar and grill (who) at Cathedral Square (where) hiring 3 chefs and 27 support staff (what) for grand opening (why) in June (when)." It's packed with information. The summary communicates the entire message of the release, which is exactly what you want to do with a release of this nature.

BODY

In the same way that the summary expands upon and gives context to the headline, the first paragraph of the body expands upon the summary, clearly stating the topic of the release again and providing further detail.

- **Headline:** How to Increase Sales by Removing Your Website's Contact Form
- **Summary:** New research shows website contact forms generate fewer conversions than click-to-call phone numbers.
- **Body (First Paragraph):** According to the results of a year-long study conducted by web intelligence firm Insite Consulting Group, companies that rely upon website contact forms for lead generation are missing out on as much as 4% of their potential lead volume. The study, which analyzed conversion rates across more than 3,000 web pages on 67 domains, found that contact forms yielded 4% fewer conversions, on average, than click-to-call phone numbers.

The opening paragraph is the most important part of the body of your press release. The body is where you deliver on the promise you've made in your headline, and you do this by providing facts, details, quotes, and other supporting information to drive your point home.

Ideally, the body of your press release should include the following.

1. **A strong opening paragraph.** We mentioned this above. This paragraph should be strong enough and detailed enough to stand on its own, as many sites will copy only the first paragraph and include a link to "Read More" on another page of the site.

2. **Supporting information.** What information do you need to include to make your point or give the reader a clear understanding of your news topic? Be specific with your supporting information, and don't forget to attach multimedia—photos, videos, your company logo, and so on—if your press release distributor allows it.

3. **Direct quotes.** Quotations keep the content lively and serve as an excellent source of detailed, specific information.

4. **A testimonial.** If you can add a testimonial from a customer, partner, vendor, or other source without being overly self-promotional, do so. Make sure to get permission from the source before quoting anyone or including anyone's name in the release.

5. **One or two links.** The body of your release is the place to include links. Make sure to include a link to your website. Link to your homepage and to an inner page of your website—a product page, for example—if it's relevant to the content of the release.

6. **A shareable conclusion.** This isn't absolutely necessary, but try to conclude with a clear, compelling statement that can be shared on social media channels.

BOILERPLATE

The boilerplate is a brief introduction to your company—who you are and what you do. This is your opportunity to include a little tasteful self-promotion. Usually three or four sentences long, the boilerplate often appears under the heading "About [Your Company]" and provides readers and media professionals with relevant information about your company and your reason for writing the press release.

When writing the boilerplate for your press release, keep the following guidelines in mind.

- Stick to the objective, third-person voice.
- Keep it limited to about three or four sentences.
- Include important facts like when your company was founded, what your company does, where you're located, and any differentiating factors that set you apart from your competitors.
- Don't use jargon. Your audience may consist of people outside your industry.
- Describe your company in a way that connects to the press release. Readers will want to know why your company wrote this release.
- Include your contact information.

Why is this part of the release called the "boilerplate?" For those who want to know, the origin of the term has to do with the way press releases were submitted and printed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Start Writing, Or Get Help

You're now armed with enough information to start writing a press release that will get results for your business. You have no excuse not to write an awesome release, so get started!

If you feel paralyzed after reading all of the above, get help with your press release. Take a moment to **contact us** about our press release writing and distribution services.