



58 Writing and delivering press releases

What is a press release?

A press release is a short, concise description of a potentially newsworthy story about your business. This is sent out to a selection of newspapers, magazines, and TV or radio stations to stimulate the interest of an editor or journalist in writing a full piece about it. The goal of a press release is to 'sell' your story. A press release can contain information about products, services, events, trends or almost anything.

Why are press releases important?

Getting your press releases regularly accepted by all types of media outlets will give your business a free and very powerful marketing opportunity. Your potential customers, who read the press, watch TV and listen to their local radio stations could be influenced by your presence and your story. As a press release is read as someone else writing about your business, it will have more power than an advertisement which is produced internally. Press releases will certainly, over time, build your profile within your marketplace. If you can get into the national press you will benefit from the high coverage, as well as building credibility through association with the publication that publishes you.

Your challenge

The bad news is that 99% of press releases are thrown in the bin, and a lot of those are written by PR agencies. So a lot of money is wasted. Your challenge is to get your press releases noticed and published. You can do this yourself once you know what to do and can follow a simple formula.

What are the ingredients of a successful press release?

The good news is that those press releases that lead to a story or interview have certain qualities in common.

- The best press releases step into the shoes of the journalist reading it, knowing that they are always searching for stories that are newsworthy and of reader interest.

- They are targeted towards the needs or interests of the audience.
- They are creative and offer something a bit different and original.
- They are well written. Your release needs to be written in proper journalistic style, with short sentences and short paragraphs. Many journalists are looking for quick and easy stories that do not take up valuable time to prepare. A properly written press release can be published with little or no editing.
- You must get it into the hands of the right journalists and editors. So do your research and know the correct name of the person to send it to.
- Make sure you send the right release to the right publication.

What kinds of press releases are likely to be newsworthy?

- **Announcements** – new products, new management, merger, changes in corporate structure, partnerships, product changes, new equipment.
- **Statements** – issue statements on topics that have an impact on your business. New legislation, for example.
- **Events** – you can create a story about every event your company participates in. These may be events you send your team to, or ones that your company hosts. Speaking engagements, trade shows, special presentations or awards and community events that show you care are also of interest.
- **Promote your customers** – write case studies showing how a particular customer accomplished a major goal because of your product or service.
- **Accomplishments** – write about milestones that you have reached such as significant numbers of customers, years in business, expansions, new funding, new sales levels reached or awards won.
- **Employees** – write about any good deeds your employees have done, achievements, community service.
- **Charity** – if you get involved in charity events, promote the fact.

WRITING A PRESS RELEASE – SPECIAL RESPONSE CHECKLIST

- ▶ What is happening in your business right now that is newsworthy?
- ▶ Read the newspapers that you aspire to get into. See what kind of stories are getting in and notice the headlines they are using. Learn from them and angle yours in a similar way.

- ▶ Create a standard template for your press releases. Find out the names of all the journalists you need to send them out to, and then start a system of creating one newsworthy story every quarter and communicating it to them.
- ▶ When you have got an idea for a story you could test it out by calling one of the local newspaper journalists and asking whether it would be of interest and if so what kind of angle would get the best chance of publication.
- ▶ Generally speaking, journalists prefer not to get dozens of phone calls as their time is at a premium, however, at a local level it can work to your advantage if you can create the opportunity for a short conversation.
- ▶ Ensure that your press release headline is attention grabbing. Test some different headlines and their impact on getting accepted or not.
- ▶ Measure the results you get; notice what is getting in where.

How to write a press release

- Your press release can be sent by letter, email or fax. Make sure that your name, full address and company details including full contact details are clear and obvious either up front or at the end.
- You also need to make sure that the editor is in no doubt what the communication is all about. So the words Press Release need to be in bold at the top of the page.
- If the release is for immediate release it needs to indicate that.
- Next will be the subject. You will need an attention-grabbing one-line headline.
- The summary should be one or two sentences that explain what the release is all about. Build your release with the most important information at the top. The release should not be the complete story, it is just the story idea that the journalist will develop.
- Keep the entire press release to one page only.
- End your press release with the basic information you want known about your company. This information can be used again in future releases.
- Mention any relevant pictures in the attachments section and then provide full contact details at the end.

Here is a sample structure for a press release:

PRESS RELEASE

To: *Editor's name, title of publication*
From: *Your name, position and company*
For immediate release

Subject:

Summary:

Attachments:

Organisation:

Contact:

How to use this information

Try it out. Create your first press release and send it out to your local newspaper and see how you get on. Taking action immediately is the only way you are going to find out if press releases are going to work for you.

Think press release and get the media attention you deserve