

Tips, Guidelines and Templates for Writing an Effective Press Release

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The following information will assist you when writing a news release for distribution through the PRWeb press release network. A well crafted press release captures the attention of journalists and is optimized for distribution over the Internet, through e-mail and over PRWeb's specialized network feeds.

Note: Some of the information contained in this tip sheet are specific to the PRWeb press release network.

Pay Attention to the Content of Your Press Release

When we talk about content, we refer to the news story you are telling. Keep the following points in mind when writing your press release.

Is your news "newsworthy?" The purpose of a press release is to inform the world of your news item. Do not use your press release to try and make a sale. A good press release answers all of the "W" questions (who, what, where, when and why), providing the media with useful information about your organization, product, service or event. If your press release reads like an advertisement, rewrite it.

Start strong. Your headline and first paragraph should tell the story. The rest of your press release should provide the detail. You have a matter of seconds to grab your readers' attention. Do not blow it with a weak opening.

Write for the Media. On occasion, media outlets, especially online media, will pick up your press release and run it in their publications with little or no modification. More commonly, journalists will use your press release as a springboard for a larger feature story. In either case, try to develop a story as you would like to have it told. Even if your news is not reprinted verbatim, it may provide an acceptable amount of exposure.

Not everything is news. Your excitement about something does not necessarily mean that you have a newsworthy story. Think about your audience. Will someone else find your story interesting? Let's assume that you have just spent a lot of effort to launch a new online store. Announcing your company's opening is always an exciting time for any business, but the last thing the media wants to write about is another online store. This is old news and uninteresting. Instead, focus on the features of your online shopping experience, unique products and services. Answer the question, "Why should anyone care?" and make sure your announcement has some news values such as timeliness, uniqueness or something truly unusual. Avoid clichés such as "customers save money" or "great customer service." Focus on the aspects of your news item that truly set you apart from everyone else.

Does your press release illustrate? Use real life examples about how your company or organization solved a problem. Identify the problem and identify why your solution is the right solution. Give examples of how your service or product fulfills needs or satisfies desires. What benefits can be expected? Use real life examples to powerfully communicate the benefits of using your product or service.

If you are reporting on a corporate milestone, make sure that you attribute your success or failures to one or more events. If your company has experienced significant growth, tell the world what you did right. Show the cause and effect.

Stick to the facts. Tell the truth. Avoid fluff, embellishments and exaggerations. If you feel that your

press release contains embellishments, perhaps it would be a good idea to set your press release aside until you have more exciting news to share. Journalists are naturally skeptical. If your story sounds too good to be true, you are probably hurting your own credibility. Even if it is true, you may want to tone it down a bit.

Pick an angle. Try to make your press release timely. Tie your news to current events or social issues if possible. Make sure that your story has a good news hook.

Use active, not passive, voice. Verbs in the active voice bring your press release to life. Rather than writing "entered into a partnership" use "partnered" instead. Do not be afraid to use strong verbs as well. For example, "The committee exhibited severe hostility over the incident." reads better if changed to "The committee was enraged over the incident." Writing in this manner, helps guarantee that your press release will be read.

Economics of words. Use only enough words to tell your story. Avoid using unnecessary adjectives, flowery language, or redundant expressions such as "added bonus" or "first time ever". If you can tell your story with fewer words, do it. Wordiness distracts from your story. Keep it concise. Make each word count.

Beware of jargon. While a limited amount of jargon will be required if your goal is to optimize your news release for online search engines, the best way to communicate your news is to speak plainly, using ordinary language. Jargon is language specific to certain professions or groups and is not appropriate for general readership. Avoid such terms as "capacity planning techniques" "extrapolate" and "prioritized evaluative procedures."

Avoid the hype. The exclamation point (!) is your enemy. There is no better way to destroy your credibility than to include a bunch of hype. If you must use an exclamation point, use one. Never do this!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Get Permission. Companies are very protective about their reputation. Be sure that you have written permission before including information or quotes from employees or affiliates of other companies or organizations. Any dispute resolution will favor the other company, meaning that your press release may get pulled.

About your company. Your press release should end with a short paragraph (company boilerplate) that describes your company, products, service and a short company history. If you are filing a joint press release, include a boilerplate for both companies.

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Formatting Your Press Release

How you present your news is just as important as its content. Some of these suggestions are specific to PRWeb's distribution service.

Mixed case. NEVER SUBMIT A PRESS RELEASE IN ALL UPPER CASE LETTERS. This is very bad form. Even if your release makes it past PRWeb's editors (highly unlikely), it will definitely be ignored by journalists. Use mixed case.

Correct grammar usage. Always follow rules of grammar and style. Errors in grammar and style affect your credibility. Excessive errors will cause your press release to be rejected by PRWeb's editors.

Word processor. Write your press release on a word processor instead of composing online. Writing online will not achieve best results. Take time to do it right. Write, print, proof read. Rewrite, edit.

No HTML. Never embed HTML or other markup languages in your press release. Your press release will be distributed over a wide array of networks. Including such formatting will negatively impact the

readability of your press release.

More than one paragraph. It is nearly impossible to tell your story in a few sentences. If you do not have more than a few sentences, chances are you do not have a newsworthy item

Summary paragraph. PRWeb asks you to include a one-paragraph summary. Some distribution points only receive your headline, summary and a link to your press release. If you fail to include a summary paragraph, you may reduce the effectiveness of your press release.

Do not include your e-mail address in the body of your release. We have a special place during the submission process for you to include your e-mail address. If you include your e-mail address in the body of your press release, you run the risk of receiving spam. This is because your e-mail address will be available to the public. Spiders routinely scour the Internet harvesting e-mail addresses for spammers. Provide your e-mail address only in the space(s) provided during the submission process.

Ticker Symbols. Never include ticker symbols of other companies without their express written permission.

Follow a Standard Press Release Format

Make sure your press release looks like a press release. The following can be used as a template for your press release.

Headline Announces News in Title Case, Ideally Under 80 Characters

The summary paragraph is a little longer synopsis of the news, elaborating on the news in the headline in one to four sentences. The summary uses sentence case, with standard capitalization and punctuation.

City, State (PRWEB) Month 1, 2006 -- The lead sentence contains the most important information in 25 words or less. Grab your reader's attention here by simply stating the news you have to announce. Do not assume that your reader has read your headline or summary paragraph; the lead should stand on its own.

A news release, like a news story, keeps sentences and paragraphs short, about three or four lines per paragraph. The first couple of paragraphs should answer the who, what, when, where, why and how questions. The news media may take information from a news release to craft a news or feature article or may use information in the release word-for-word, but a news release is not, itself, an article or a reprint.

The standard press release is 300 to 800 words and written in a word processing program that checks spelling and grammar before submission to PRWeb. This template is 519 words.

The ideal headline is 80 characters long. PRWeb will accept headlines with a maximum of 170 characters. PRWeb recommends writing your headline and summary last, to be sure you include the most important news elements in the body of the release. Use title case in the headline only, capitalizing every word except for prepositions and articles of three characters or less.

The rest of the news release expounds on the information provided in the lead paragraph. It includes quotes from key staff, customers or subject matter experts. It contains more details about the news you have to tell, which can be about something unique or controversial or about a prominent person, place or thing.

Typical topics for a news release include announcements of new products or of a strategic partnership, the receipt of an award, the publishing of a book, the release of new software or the

launch of a new Web site. The tone is neutral and objective, not full of hype or text that is typically found in an advertisement. Avoid directly addressing the consumer or your target audience. The use of "I," "we" and "you" outside of a direct quotation is a flag that your copy is an advertisement rather than a news release.

Do not include an e-mail address in the body of the release. If you do, it will be protected from spambots with a notice to that effect, which will overwrite your e-mail address.

"The final paragraph of a traditional news release contains the least newsworthy material," said Mario Bonilla, member services director for PRWeb. "But for an online release, it's typical to restate and summarize the key points with a paragraph like the next one."

For additional information on the news that is the subject of this release (or for a sample, copy or demo), contact Mary Smith or visit www.prweb.com. You can also include details on product availability, trademark acknowledgment, etc. [here](#).

About XYZ Company:

Include a short corporate backgrounder, or "boilerplate," about the company or the person who is newsworthy before you list the contact person's name and phone number.

Contact:

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