



HOW TO WRITE PRESS RELEASES THAT GET MEDIA ATTENTION

By Janet Attard

How do you get the press to sit up and take notice of you instead of your competitors?

While some people use gimmicks such as brightly colored paper in an attempt to make their releases get noticed by busy reporters, the real "trick" to getting media attention is to pique the editor's interest in your MESSAGE. In other words, make the person who receives your release think, "Here is something that will INTEREST my READERS."

What interests editors and their readers? Your release should contain actual "news" about yourself, your products or services, your company, or personnel in your company. Information that qualifies as news (depending on the publications to which you are submitting your release) include, but are not limited to announcements about:

- The release of a new product
- Launch of a new service
- Opening of a new store
- Awards you or your company have won
- "Firsts" (e.g., first to offer a particular service or product in your area, first product to solve
- a common, but previously unsolvable problem)
- Contests your company is sponsoring
- Winners in of a contest you've sponsored
- Free seminars you are offering
- Free booklets you are offering
- Results or a survey your company has conducted
- How you or your company helped solve a community problem
- Opening of a new business
- New, unusual uses of an old product
- Donations you've made to a nonprofit group

Writing the Release

Just announcing your news isn't enough, however. The launch of your new service may be news to you, but to a reporter or editor, who has to read hundreds of releases about new products and services, it's not likely to be interesting news. Therefore, it may find it's way quickly to the trash bin. Suppose you've just opened a resume service and as part of the launch you've decided give away a two-page tip sheet on how to cope with a layoff. You won't drum up much interest if your headline reads John Doe Opens Resume Service and the first paragraph of your release starts out like this:

John Doe today opened Resumes to Go, a resume writing and typesetting service located at 123 Main St., Anytown, IL. As part of the opening, Doe will be offering a tip sheet to help downsized workers... You're more likely to get interest and get a story written about you by changing your headline and first paragraph to focus on the tip sheet you are giving away.

For instance the headline might read:

Is There Life after Layoff?

Resume Service Offers Tip Sheet for Downsized Workers

The opening paragraphs might read:

The unthinkable has happened. Your company downsized and decided that you were no longer needed. How can you cope? What should you do first? That's the subject of Getting Back on Track, a tip sheet for downsized workers being offered by Resumes to Go, a new resume service located in Anytown, IL. The tip sheet outlines 5 common job-hunting mistakes made by downsized workers, and tells how to overcome them.

Before you start writing the release, choose the angle (what's interesting about your news) to use. If you will be sending your release to various media (local newspapers, large metro newspaper, TV stations, trade magazines, etc.) you may have to use different angles for the different media. For instance if you have just published a new book on how to get your family to share the housework, you'd get the attention of local newspaper editors with a news angle (local author makes good). But if you were sending a release about the same book to editors of national publications, you would stress the solution your book provides to a common problem: how working mothers can keep the house clean and neat without hiring a cleaning person.

Gather all the facts and figures you will need to complete the release. Like any news story, the release should include the basic information about, who, what, where, when, why and how. In addition, your release should contain a release date (notice of when the information may be published); and details of who to contact for more information.

When you've gathered all your fact together and decided on the angle to use (the fact or slant that will interest the editor), write one or two brief headlines sum up the importance of your angle. These should be short but contain enough detail to "hook" the editor and convince him/her there is something in the rest of the release that might be worth publishing. Explain your angle in the first paragraph of the release. Then use the rest of the release to explain the who, what, where, when, why and how, putting the most important information at the beginning of the release, and the least important (from a news standpoint) near the end.. Flesh out the middle section with one or two quotes expressing opinions about the importance of your news.

How to Format the Release

Type or have your press release printed on your business letterhead, following the standard press release format described below:

Type the words NEWS RELEASE or, PRESS RELEASE on the left side of the paper, a couple of lines below your name and address.

Skip one line then type in the words

RELEASE DATE: followed by the date you want the story released, or the words FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE if the story can be used any time.

Skip another line and type in the word CONTACT: followed by the name(s) of one or two people to contact for additional information or to verify facts.

Skip another line and type one or two headlines centered and boldfaced (dark type) in the middle of the page. If you use two headlines, skip a line between them.

Skip another line, then start typing the text of your release.

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