

# Writing a press release that will turn **media heads**

Imagine how your business could benefit if it received some solid media coverage, in a newspaper, a magazine, on radio, television, or online. Media outlets are used to receiving press releases. In fact, most outlets encourage them. Why? - because if you can send them what is, in effect, a ready-made story, you are helping them to fill the space in their publication that they need to fill.

The figures speak for themselves. At least 50 per cent of the news items you read every day are likely to have been generated from press releases. In some publications the percentage is even higher.

So what makes a good press release, and how do you make your press release stand out from all the others sent into media outlets on a daily basis? Well, the media is fundamentally interested in newsworthy stories and information - preferably information that is new (has not been announced or published previously), topical and interesting. Above all, it must be well written.

## ***Putting pen to paper***

Once you have reached the decision that you have something newsworthy to publish or broadcast, unless you have determined to leave the writing part to the experts, you will need to start putting pen to paper or fingers to the keys. Writing a strong, hard-hitting press release takes skill. Its primary purpose is to immediately attract the attention of the reader - the editor, producer or journalist that will be receiving it in their email inbox or over the fax machine.

There are four key components of a well-written press release:

- The headline
- The lead or introduction
- The body text
- The contact information

## ***Hard-Hitting Headlines***

The headline needs to be well-worded, eye catching but not too sensational, and not too long. It should be near the top of the press release, but under the words MEDIA RELEASE and the dateline. The headline needs to capture the very essence - the key message - of your media release, because that will be the first line that editors or journalists will read. If the headline isn't compelling, they're unlikely to read further, and your finely crafted release could be relegated to the deleted items folder or recycling bin. A headline generally should be in sentence case and, where possible, be no longer than one line. Two lines are acceptable, but certainly no more.

## ***Strong Leads***

Having been enticed by your headline to read on further the next and equally critical component of a well-written press release is the lead or introduction. It is where you spell out the most important facts about your announcement, backing up your headline and providing additional information to

interest the reader. If the lead is weak, it is also unlikely your release will gain too much interest and again, will probably be rejected.

## **In publicity terms, a good press release is worth its weight in gold**

Every press release must answer six questions: Who, What, When, Where, Why and How?

- What will happen or, has happened?
- To whom it will happen?
- Where it will happen?
- When it will happen?
- Why it will happen?
- How it will happen?

It may not be possible to incorporate all these factors in the opening sentence, given a lead should ideally be no more than 25 to 30 words. However, it is important that all key points are addressed, even if some need to be continued in the second sentence.

### **Body Language**

On average, a press release should be no longer than about 500 words. That is equal to approximately one Word page of text, although once the header information, headline and contact information are inserted, many releases spill over to two pages. Once the strongest part of the press release has been written, the remainder should really be supporting information to the core subject of the release. This should include additional relevant information and, where possible, direct quotes from individuals that can be contacted by the media for additional comment. Quite often, media will follow up a press release to gather additional comments or information that they can build into their article. The last part of the body text can be some background information on your organisation or management, such as details about what the organisation does, its services or subsidiaries, and its operating history.

### **Making Contacts**

One of the most important components of a press release is the contact information. As detailed above, media will often require additional comments or information so contact information needs to include a contact name, their position, and a landline and/or mobile telephone number.

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