

The Write Way To Get Noticed



BILL PRICKETT EXPLAINS HOW THE WORDS WE USE REPRESENT OUR BUSINESSES

NEWS RELEASES, PITCH letters, fact sheets, speeches, position statements, media alerts, talking points and feature articles—what do all these activities have in common? They are all part of public relations responsibilities and all involve writing.

Probably the most common and well-known aspect of public relations is the news press release,

which informs existing and potential customers about your company, its successes, activities, new products and services, upcoming plans, or personnel or organizational changes.

THE BENEFITS OF NEWS RELEASES

There's more to public relations than press releases; but when done

correctly with forethought, planning and skill, they can go a long way in fulfilling your PR goals. When the media picks up your news releases, wonderful results can be accomplished.

- **Consumer information and education**

One of the best ways to get important information about >>

There's more to public relations than press releases.

your company and/or your products publicized is through news releases. Your message will give your target audience a better understanding of who you are and what you have to offer.

• **Credibility to your message**

When you take out an ad in a newspaper, you reach an audience with your message. However, when a media outlet writes an article or does a news report based on your news release, you reach an audience

In turn, the more people know about you, the more they hear about you in the news—in a good way, of course, don't forget Enron—and the more your reputation increases the more business you'll get.

GUIDELINES FOR GOOD NEWS RELEASES

The basic principles for writing a good news release can be learned. Take a look at these guidelines:

should be one to two pages and no more than 500 words.

Style counts. Design your page for easy readability and format fonts to enhance legibility. Don't use funky fonts and don't type the entire release in *italics* because that's hard to read. If you don't know the correct, accepted format for a news release, find out—and follow the traditional pattern. (Most PR books can help here, as well as many internet sites.)

Like most industries, we have a lingo and acronyms that most of us know—PMS colors, wicking, PPAI, RAC, overrun, UPIC, emboss, hot stamp and end-quantity pricing—but these can be confusing to outsiders.

Say it simply. Avoid using industry jargon editors won't understand. Like most industries, we have a lingo and acronyms that most of us know—PMS colors, wicking, PPAI, RAC, overrun, UPIC, emboss, hot stamp and end-quantity pricing—but these can be confusing to outsiders.

Check your release for terminology that might not be clear to the average reader. Remember, you're not trying to impress editors with your industry knowledge—you just want them to run your story.

with what amounts to a third-party endorsement. It adds greater credibility when someone else is telling your story. And think of the money you saved as compared with the same amount of coverage from placing an ad.

• **Image, reputation—and business**

Obviously, most people only send a news release when they want to share good news—successes and accomplishments. But, remember to send a news release when you have a new product to introduce. Write a news release when you participate in a charity event or take a leadership role in a community project. These kinds of announcements will help increase your reputation among those who read and hear about you.

Send to the correct person.

Don't send your tradeshow announcement to the religion editor or a news release about promotional products to the political reporter.

Get their attention, and then get to the point. Craft a headline to convey immediately why this news is important. If you want the media to run your story, you need to make it appealing because they will only run stories that serve their readers' interests. What you say in the news release headline determines whether the recipient will read the rest of it.

To keep them reading, don't bury your story. A strong leading paragraph answers: *who?*, *what?*, *when?*, *where?*, *why?* and *how?* The maximum length of the release

Don't sell. It's almost a given that a news release that tries to sell or advertise will be tossed. Avoid cheap, over-used advertising words, such as "one of a kind," "greatest" or "best in the world."

Tell the truth. This should go without saying—but never lie in your news release. The purpose is to report news, not make it up. On this same note, don't exaggerate either.

Don't make mistakes. Always run the spell checker before you send out your press release, but don't use it as your only proofing method. Consider the following

>> Continued on page 88



for errors and omissions. Another option is to read the release aloud—word by word—very slowly. Remember you are sending your release to writers and editors, who are notoriously critical. A typo in a press release can label your company as “small-time,” no matter how big your news may be.

Provide complete contact information. The listed contact

asked me to send out a news release to the local media, promoting an event that was taking place the next morning. Needless to say, we didn’t receive any coverage of that event.

Bring it to a close. The standard way to end a news release is with the symbols “# # #” centered after the last paragraph. You might also want to include a “boilerplate” company summary—brief informa-

When practicing public relations, it is **essential** that writing be **done well** or your efforts will be **undermined, even ridiculed**, by those you are trying to impress and influence.

>> Continued from page 84 paragraph, as a spell checker would not find all the errors:

My pea sea has a built inn spelling checker. Cents I've never had a coarse in spelling, and I knead to dew my best, they or very helpful. It will make it plane when eye make a typing miss steak. It freeze me to concentrate on other matters and I just except that my computer is write. I'm sure yule agree how important that is because wee all no that reporters don't have to much thyme to reed everything that comes across there desk four revue. Its sew much better too weight for you're spell checker to finish, then send out thee release. If you want to bee a good rider, go out and by one fore you're computer. They are grate. And when your threw, you can relax, knowing that even if ewe maid any miss stakes, the cheque will make it rite.

It's always a good idea to have someone else read the news release

should be someone who's available and capable of answering questions from reporters. Always include contact name, company name, full address, phone number, e-mail address and website URL.

Timing is everything. Before you send out a release, it's good to know the deadlines of the outlets you are targeting. Daily reporters (TV and newspapers) usually have deadlines for breaking news, but they may also be working on features up to a month in advance. Magazines typically close their editorial content about two months in advance of the issue date. Radio, television and electronic journalists run short, timely stories based on breaking news.

Several years ago, I was doing volunteer work with a political campaign. The campaign manager called on a Friday evening and

tion to help establish your expertise, such as products or services, location and years in business.

There are some who say writing is a talent, and others call it an art. While not everyone can write like Alcott, Steinbeck, Faulkner, Tolkein or Angelou, the basic principles of writing can be learned. However, whether a natural talent, an applied art form or a learned skill, writing correctly takes time and concentration.

When practicing public relations, it is essential that writing be done well or your efforts will be undermined, even ridiculed, by those you are trying to impress and influence. **PPB**



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