

Writing An ‘Effective’ Press Release

Tips to help it flow

By Bob ‘Idea Man’ Hooley

Public relations professionals worldwide use the ‘news release’ as a method of providing information about their clients and companies to the media. **For best results, a news release should be clear, concise, well written and news related.** Each release should adhere to the same basic format.

News releases are frequently used as sources by editors to create news stories. I’d suggest it might be helpful, if in writing your release, you understand how news stories are selected and written.

Model your release after generally accepted styles in the media. This will help you get your story published or broadcast. If you endeavor to put yourself in the editor’s shoes, you may find your efforts more successful in this challenge to be heard.

In printing news stories, the most important information is placed at the beginning of the release, and the less important items or facts follow in descending order. This style is chosen to ensure the most important is easily read and printed in the magazine or paper. If the editor is short on space, and must edit or shorten the release, he will often cut information from the end of the piece. If you’ve ever read something in a local paper that doesn’t make sense or cuts off in the middle of a sentence, this may be the reason.

Try to keep your paragraphs and sentences short and concise. This will help the editor and can help ensure your message isn’t partially received.

Consider carefully the 5 W’s when you decide what to place at the beginning of the release. Skillful use of these 5 helpers may win you the prize you seek – publication!

- ✎ WHO’s affected? Who wins? Who loses? Who is honored? Who retired?
- ✎ WHAT is happening? What does it mean? What does it impact?
- ✎ WHEN did it happen? When will it happen? When will you know more?
- ✎ WHERE is it happening? Where will it happen? Where are you located?
- ✎ WHY is it happening? Why not before now? Why did your group sponsor it?
- ✎ HOW does it work? How are people affected? How can people get information?

If possible, your lead sentence or first paragraph should try to incorporate or answer all these questions. You may, however, need to answer some of these in the second paragraph.

Once you’ve determined what information to include, you should also decide on attribution. It is extremely important to attribute information accurately to a specific individual, organization or source. This adds credibility to any press release and is vital to it being well received.

Specific quotes, attributed to individuals make your press release more readable and interesting. It can be used to follow up on an idea you've already presented earlier in the release or to introduce new information. Any facts or statistical information should be attributed for credibility as well. For example, according to the Better Business Bureau, "80% of all new businesses...."

Editors have hundreds of news releases, faxes and letters cross their desk every day. From this avalanche of non-requested information flow, they need to decide what gets published in a very limited time frame or space in their paper or in a shorter format on a broadcast. The items they choose are generally considered 'news.' What makes it news? If you attempt to understand and then write your release from their perspective and needs, you will find a better reception and chance of publication or broadcast.

Generally, there are **five elements that would constitute news.**

- ✂ IMPACT – i.e., the largest concert in local history
- ✂ ODDITY – the one millionth customer in your store
- ✂ CONFLICT – i.e., opposition to the Premier's call for increased taxes
- ✂ KNOWN PRINCIPAL – i.e. The MAYO today announced...
- ✂ PROXIMITY – i.e. The regional manager announced today...

SUCCESSFUL news releases are designed to be brief and concise. We often include abbreviations and acronyms. If the complete name is spelled out in the first reference and abbreviated in subsequent references, this is acceptable. For example, the "Canadian Association of Professional Speakers announced a new service to CAPS members..."

News releases are frequently used to announce the dates, places and times of upcoming meetings or special events, typically called public service announcements (PSA's). It is standard practice in this type of release to write the information with the time given first, followed by the date and then the place. For example, "For Immediate Release – the seminar will be held at 1:30PM, Friday March 14th, 200_" Using standard format will help ensure that your information is accurately reported, and the message gets out to your audience.

When you've finished writing your release it is **ABSOLUTELY** essential to **PROOFREAD** it for errors in spelling or grammar. Editors and reporters are trained to spot these typos or errors. Your spelling may affect your chances of being published. **TIP:** after you've proofed it personally, have it done by someone else. A fresh set of eyes might pick up something we miss because we are too familiar with it. Then, read it backwards, word by word to pick up not easily detected mistakes.

These tips, when applied, can help you or your group increase your chances of seeing your event or cause receive much needed exposure or in gaining recognition for what you bring to the community. Persistence works! Keep sending them out. I've been fortunate to have a large number of my press releases picked up and run, a couple even generated guest articles for me.

Bob 'Idea Man' Hooey, DTM, PRA, CKD-Emeritus, Accredited Speaker, 2011 Spirit of CAPS recipient is an inspirational leader, speaker, and a prolific author whose works include **'Legacy of Leadership, Strive for significance – lead on purpose!'**, **'Speaking for Success'** and **'The Courage to Lead!'** His articles have been featured in a multitude of North American trade and global consumer publications. He is a respected leader who has been honored by CAPS, NSA, Toastmasters, and the United Nations for his leadership contributions. His creative Ideas At Work have allowed him to travel the globe sharing insights, encouragement in 61 countries, so far. With Covid-19 he has been zooming around the globe to share his ideas. His **innovative Ideas At Work!** have been successfully applied by global leaders as well as Canada's 50 Best Managed Companies.