

Lesson 5: Press Release

Press releases are one of the most thought out and specific forms of content you can create. I say this because they have a very strict format and those who attempt them without knowing that format will not achieve what they set out to achieve. Module 6 will go into detail on how to write the perfect press release whereas this lesson is going to cover how to distribute one.

So what is the specific format you are required to use? Follow these simple steps:

1. Audience

One of the key things to establish before you even write your press release is who your target audience are. What you write for a fashion magazine would be entirely different to what you would write for a local newspaper. If you are approaching different news outlets you will need to write different versions of your press release. Your core focus is what your target audience will be interested in and want to read about.

2. Is it newsworthy

Whenever you write something in the hope of being printed it has to be newsworthy. When you own a company this can sometimes be hard to establish. Your business is very important to you so when you achieve success you want to shout about it. Unfortunately, not everything that is important to you will capture the attention of a journalist and if they do not consider it newsworthy, it won't get coverage.

One of the surest ways to attract a journalist's attention is to write around a human interest angle. If you can show that your news has an impact on people then you are fulfilling one of the key elements that a journalist looks for.

3. Research

It is essential to research the press and media that you will be approaching. Have a look at what they have printed/created in the past – so find some back copies of publications. This way you can tailor your story to suit their style. Every story has numerous layers to it and depending on where you intend to send it decides which of those layers you pull to the fore.

If a company launches a product, there might be mileage in targeting any, or all, of the following:

- local press (the area in which the company is based)
- specialist press (the company's sector)
- specialist press (read by people who will benefit from the news in the release)
- consumer press (if there is a more mainstream benefit)
- national press (if there is significant impact or change)

When you do your research, identify working patterns and deadlines. Many weekly local papers, for example, have a Tuesday deadline for Thursday publication. So, you might be wise not to issue and chase a local press journalist on a Tuesday when they are trying to finalise their stories.

4. Establish a relationship

Just like an outreach you need to nurture a relationship with selected journalists – they are human beings at the end of the day. One of the best ways to reach out to journalists is via social media. I would certainly look at utilising LinkedIn and Twitter to this end. You can retweet and favourite some of their tweets for an initial step. Then comment on something and strike up a conversation. You don't need them to be your best friend – you are just making sure you stand out a little from the crowd.

I would do this from the start of any marketing campaign so you are establishing a rapport with any journalists local to you or crucial to your industry news distribution. It only takes a small instance of recognition for a journalist to be drawn to your press release over thousands of others.

5. Follow the rules to the letter

If you check out a news site and they tell you to send press releases in via email with a specific subject line on a particular day then make sure you do that. This is an easy stage but you wouldn't believe how many people ignore the rules. Some media institutions have a very strict process for submitting press releases so do what they tell you to do and not what you think will be best!

6. Send it electronically

There are a few exceptions but most journalists expect receive press releases via email. It's best practise to treat the subject line on the email as the title, to grab the journalist's attention. Any release sent by email should be pasted into the email rather than attached. Many press and media organisations have automatic blocks on attachments. For this reason it is also wise to avoid any jpeg logos. Journalists are inundated by emails, so do follow up your emailed press release with a telephone call to check receipt and help sell your idea.

So those are the mechanics of sending a press release. The SEO benefit is minimal these days because more and more companies are doing it but the press coverage around a newsworthy event is not to be sniffed at.

If you are looking to fill a workshop, increase employee morale, increase brand awareness, show the bullies at school how far you have come, or simply raising your profile in your local area – press releases still pack a punch.

To learn how to write one see lesson 3 in Module 6.