

How to Write and Distribute a Press Release at Make It Better 10/8/13

Instructor - Julianne Beck

PR = mutually beneficial relationship

News

- Must be timely - show timeliness in heading
- Must be relevant - why do other people need to know? Heading shows connection to people - geographically relevant
- Must be useful/serve purpose
- Must be accurate

Press Releases

- Provide news to reporters, editors, producers.
- Demonstrate clear news value.
- Follow universal format/layout – important because first impression counts.
- Can post press release on website to help drive searches to website.

Create Press Releases

- What is your objective? (Increase awareness? Increase attendance at events?)
- Set measurable goals. (What are you looking for: calendar events, increased traffic to website, features article?)
- What is your announcement? (Should be able to say what your story is in one sentence.)
- Who needs to know about your news and why?
- Who is the spokesperson? Someone quoted in news release, person who would be interviewed if called. Should be same person to get associated with brand. Should be available. Ideally person sending press release should not be same person quoted.

Format

- Templates are available online.
- Write on letterhead with logo.
- "PRESS RELEASE" should be in bold near top.
- "FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE" should be in bold near top.
- Contact name and direct phone number near top. Important that person listed is available on short notice. (Not spokesperson but rather the person making arrangements.)
- One line headline - in bold, normal caps, not all caps -- needs to convey all elements of press release.
- One line subhead that offers new angle.
- Do not use different font styles, use just one or two.
- The lead in to the first paragraph - dateline in all caps, then state abbreviation - WINNETKA, IL (10/8/13)
- At bottom of release, signal end of release with three hashtags -- ###
- Include boilerplate information about the organization - one line description of organization and/or mission statement. Keep as brief as possible.
- Ideal length is one to two pages

How to Write and Distribute a Press Release at Make It Better 10/8/13

Instructor - Julianne Beck

Example of Heading and Sub-Head

Heading: "Lincoln Park Zoo Awarded \$3 Million Leadership Gift for Education"

Subhead: "Harris Center for Learning Innovation and Collaboration Will Be Able to Offer Children's Learning Program"

Content

- Inverted pyramid style of writing - who, what, when, where, how. Most important information should be at the top. Lead facts, stats, numbers are good at top. Keep reader angle - what will keep reader reading? Has to grab them immediately.
- Use Associated Press (AP) Style.
- Write in present tense/active voice. Avoid a lot of historical info
- Keep sentences brief.
- Use simple words.
- Avoid clichés.
- Use quotes from spokesperson. Quotes centered on why AUDIENCE should be excited -- not why spokesperson is excited. One quote per person.
- Limit quotes in release to three.
- Limit length to one to two pages (if in print and more than one page, write "(more)") at bottom of page.
- Use original content - don't quote other media.
- Tone should be factual and objective - no emotion or opinion unless inside quote. Use opinion adjectives in text, not heading.
- Avoid using all caps in body -- looks like shouting.
- Avoid exclamation points!
- Visual vs. Factual story - If visual, send to TV rather than newspapers.
 - If visual story, don't send photo with press release. Just make note that photos are available or make a note that photos are available or include link to photos (i.e. link to website).

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) Considerations

- Write for people and technology - keep reader benefits in mind
- Use keywords - words that people type into search engine. Get one in headline and first sentence. Sprinkle throughout. Subject, verb, object headline. Subhead should not repeat a single word in headline
- Lead paragraph up to 25 words, but should be more than 1 sentence
- All paragraphs should be more than one sentence
- Body copy ideally 250-400 words. Could be up to 700 words, but over 700 words can turn search engines off.
- Links should be website address written out in full, not hyperlinks inside text.
- (Not all reporters read with hyper-link capability)
- Ideal length of boilerplate (end of release) is 6 words - short!
- One link per 100 words is recommended, two to three links in total.

How to Write and Distribute a Press Release at Make It Better 10/8/13

Instructor - Julianne Beck

Send Your Release

- Conduct online research of your local media news outlets and create a spreadsheet of the names and email addresses and/or Twitter handles for each of the media contacts.
- Email release in body copy of email message. Include headline of release in subject matter of email. Don't attach visuals. Also attach release on letterhead. Not matter if Word format or pdf.
- Can use distribution service. Can be expensive, but they will help locate people in industry who might pick up your press release.
- In email, customize salutation and short note for each person it is being sent.
- Post in online newsroom on website
- Cross-promote on social media because you might not get any media to pick it up.
- Follow-up (about one week later). View it as though you are doing the reporters a favor in bringing their attention to your important story. Can be either phone call or email. Remember to be polite, be concise and be prepared.

Measure Success

- Collect & review clips in print or online.
- Track website analytics.
- Calculate media impressions - look at circulation size of media that ran story and add them up.