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Harnessing The Awesome Power of PRESS RELEASES



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Damon Smith; Publisher, [Haileys Comet Weekly Ezine](#)

Harnessing the Awesome Power of Press Releases

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Marketing to the Media Mindset – An Overview of Why They Accept and Deny Your Submissions.

Submitting your well-crafted press release is a bit like standing behind the red velvet rope, hoping you have what it takes to make it past the doorman and gain admittance into an “A” list event. The competition is fierce, with only the best of the best making it to the editor’s desk, much less into the hands of the public.

So how can you rise above all others and make your press release gleam in the eyes of the publisher? All you need is a dash of researching skills, a pinch of creative talent, and a sprinkle of media insight, and you’ve whipped up a blue ribbon recipe for a results-oriented press release.

The media mindset is a very powerful entity. What filters through the desk of an editor to the pulse of America is whatever he or she deems newsworthy. Scandals. Tragedies. Triumphs. From international terrorism to Cousin Cathy's canine hero, the media hold all the cards when it comes to what we do and do *not* know.

They also decide, to a certain degree, the influence each story has on the public by the size of space they assign to it. Readers are obviously going to focus on a half-size, front-page feature article more than they will a 10-line blurb buried in the back of the local section. Placement is crucial because it determines how close your news will get to the reader's eyes.

Fortunately, news sells. So garnering attention for your press release will be a little like a sales pitch, without the blatant advertising. Sound impossible? Not when you consider how the media mindset operates.

News is, perhaps, the most rapidly changing industry in existence. One minute, a world leader is an internationally respected figure, and in seconds, CNN or some other 24-hour news circuit has leveled his career with devastating "just released" information. The power they wield is most definitely a force with which to be reckoned.

Editors are faced with a stack of news items every day, with only a limited space to position them. The submissions on their desks rank in order of importance, and from that list, comes the height and width of your column. In order to have a larger piece of the pie, you need to make sure your press release is unique, timely, and important to their audience.

Depending on the relevance of your information, some editors may take the time to rework your release into a suitable style and format for their publication. Don't give them any reason to choose someone else's press release over yours.

Space is valuable, whether it's in the form of print, time on the radio or television. If you want to advertise your product or services, you'll have to pay a hefty price. This is where the importance of creating an unbiased press release enters. Editors will decide if they want to allow your item *free* space, in the form of a news story, or if they'll reject it, and make you purchase an ad block instead.

There are certain rules to play by when dealing with your media contacts. Courtesies and common sense both play an important role in how they view your news. And don't forget to take into consideration the local tone and flavor of your own community's press.

Some media giants won't entertain the idea of publishing local news items that do not affect the country on a whole, even if it's the New York Times, and your soon-to-be-launched website or product is based out of New York City. But if the information is relevant enough to achieve national interest, then they *will* consider publishing your press release.

If, however, you are gearing your release to a local audience through a community press market, then do all you can to develop and maintain a rapport with the person or individuals who make the decisions on whether or not to give your item the columns and inches you so desire. And never, ever address your press release to an editor who no longer works for the company. Take a few seconds to read the latest masthead to find out who the current editor is, and then send it to the right person – making sure to spell the first and last name correctly.

If you're on friendly terms, the editor might give you inside information or direction on why your press item was denied space in the next issue. As a contributing reporter, which is what a press release writer is, you're an extension of the news department. So learn everything you can about how to be a team player with each organization. Request their stylebook, or ask if they adhere to any particular news format.

If, however, you discount the style of the paper or other media company, then your value diminishes because you've actually *added* work to their already hectic schedules. If you disregard the pertinent formatting and style functions, then the *paid* staff has to redo the work you've already sent in, whether it's deciphering and typing your handwritten release, or reorganizing the information so that it can easily be edited and cut where necessary.

Many papers have a small staff, leaving extra work for the editor, such as sorting through the news, choosing photographs to accompany the stories, and plenty of time-consuming administrative tasks. The easier you make it on the editor, the more likely you'll see your headlines. If you've followed the basic rules for the publication,

you've made the process quicker, allowing the editor to concentrate his or her time on other important issues.

Alternately, if you show little respect to the editor by writing your press release in longhand, and demanding, or assuming that it be in the next issue, you'll be met with barriers, and will likely ruin your chances that they'll even consider your next submission.

News departments, chained to a volley of strict deadlines, simply do not have the time or manpower to sift through a horde of varying contributor styles and formats. Therefore, it is in your best interest to follow the publication's submission guidelines when sending in your news. If you don't, you run the risk of having your submission thrown away without any consideration from the staff. Busy editors won't waste time editing for style if they have to rewrite your entire piece, not when another submission might be similar in worthiness, and have the right style for their publication.

Take the time to investigate your target media conglomerates. Find out the structure of who makes the decisions on what goes in, and, just as important, what stays *out* of the publication. When you get this information, use it to your advantage.

Go to the library and research back issues of the publication. Find out what items they've deemed newsworthy in the past, and see what tone, or "voice," the reporters used. If you can tailor your style to something similar to what the existing decision-maker has accepted for publication in the past, chances are you'll be on your way to seeing your item in print.

Some media have their style incorporated right into their name. The Republican Times, for example, tells you right upfront that a liberal article on a pro-democratic issue probably doesn't have too good of a chance to make it into print.

Who owns your target publication? Many mainstream media are owned by very large, profitable, and powerful corporations. Be aware that if you're a competing company, you might not be accepted for the sheer fact of who the "big" boss is.

The media will begin judging your press release from the moment they remove it from the envelope, lift it off the fax machine, or click on their email. First impressions are of utmost importance, so you'd be wise to make sure it's aesthetically pleasing.

Follow proper formatting standards such as typing and font color and size. Don't get too cute and send it in on rainbow paper to make a splash. You'll make a splash all right – deep into the wastebasket! They've seen it all, but what it boils down to is “newsworthy” or “not.”

Your first contact with the media should always accomplish the following:

- Get the editor's attention
- Easily identify your topic
- Showcase your news writing abilities
- Provide verifiable source materials and contacts
- Include several easy ways for the editor or reporter to reach you should they have any questions or want a more in-depth article written about your product or services.

If you don't pique the audience's attention from the very first sentence, you may have lost them forever. An editor cannot possibly scan each and every press release sent to them to figure out what the writer is trying to say.

Make their job easier by stating the facts, but do it in a way that makes it a headline topic. Instead of titling your release, “New real estate site launched,” try something like “HomeBasePlus emerges triumphant in the battle of technology versus service.” It's catchy, and the lead sentence can clearly explain what the title hints. Chances are, your headline will be changed anyway, but hook the editor's eye from the beginning.

Don't try to impress the reader with overly expressive adjectives or superlatives. They'll only be edited out, and it gives your press release a phony tone, like that of an advertisement, as opposed to a factual news item.

Resist the urge to boast about your product or services. Offer the vital information about the “who, what, when, where, and why,” and let the reader take a proactive approach in discovering its benefits from that point on.

Using quotes from experts or management personnel within the company or industry offers credibility to your press release. Media contacts love to be able to attribute a name to the concepts or opinions found within the piece, so choose wisely, and pick the most authoritative figure possible. Instead of using a positive quote from one of your customer's, have the President of the corporation say a few words.

If you're sending in a press release about a soon to be launched website, or a newly formed company, be sure to include a direct contact name, phone number, and email address if possible, so that a reporter can easily find you if he or she has any questions about the information.

While the media are constantly competing amongst themselves to be the first to report (or *scoop*) headline news, contributors are competing to *be* that news. Give yourself a head start by learning the publication's style, and respectfully submit your item to the appropriate contact.

Before you send anything, ask yourself the following questions:

- Did I follow the proper formatting styles seen in a recent issue? Does it need to be rewritten by the editorial staff, or did I manage to develop a clear and concise document?
- Is my information timely? Is it news, or advertising?
- Does it affect the majority of the publication's audience?
- Are my facts correct, and verifiable?
- Is it objective, or have I approached the topic in a biased manner?
- Have I cut out any unnecessary information or boasting, so that it appears like any other news item?
- Is the press release reader-friendly? Did I use the word "embark" where I could have used "go?" Did I use any "hype" words such as "exhilarating," or "thrilling?"
- Did I include my contact information so that the editor can easily contact me if he or she has any questions?
- Does the press release urge readers to take a proactive approach in contacting the company or organization for further information?

Once you understand the media mindset, it's easier to conform to their standards and expectations. Many times, contributors and editors are at odds because they simply don't understand where the other is coming from. More often than not, an editor has been in the shoes of a contributor, and he or she now understands why editors work the way they do.

The news industry is a rushed and hurried environment, and like other staff departments, anything you can do to alleviate the stress of deadlines and tight spaces will be greatly appreciated. The more you work with your local news, the more receptive they'll be when it comes time to consider one of your press releases. If they can rely on you to follow simple procedures, leaving them with minimal follow-up work, then they'll most likely be eager to hear what it is you have to say in the future.

Remember that you, as a contributor, and the editor, who makes the decisions, rely on each other for information and coverage. Without press releases, he may not be able to fill up the space in his paper. And without the editor, you won't have the news you wish to get in front of the readers reaching *anybody*.

Public relations officials, and others who write and distribute press releases, sometimes feel dejected when their item doesn't make it into print over another similar piece. But the editor looks at it from a newsworthy standpoint. Which press release, out of the hundreds, or thousands received each day, has what it takes to be worthy of their reader's time and attention? Craft your release well, and you'll raise your chances of publication immensely.

Follow Your Facts – How Research Validates Your Voice

In the news business, facts and figures have to be true. Period. There is no other way around it, because the only thing a newspaper hates worse than being scooped is being wrong. Then, a retraction has to be printed, or a "We regret the error" notice in small print on page two, just to legally cover all bases.

If you're the reason the newspaper (or other media venue) printed false information, believe me, they'll remember you every time the phone rings and they have to field a call from an angry reader who isn't happy with them.

The best way to avoid this sticky problem is to verify your facts. One way is to pretend you're a lawyer and that anything that's hearsay is inadmissible. The judge, or the editor in this case, will hold you in contempt if you try to sneak in unverified facts before the jury, also known as the readers.

Checking your facts could help build your credentials in the business. Making errors that actually make it into print could cost you your credibility, if not legal fees for slander or worse. Editors will appreciate it if they don't have to run all over town, verifying facts that they worry might be inaccurate. If you have a press release that's heavy with complicated information, then provide any contact information for the editor that you can, in case he wants to have a staff member verify your story.

When writing up your release, never assume anything you're not positive of. Not only will the company or organization be angry if wrong information is printed, but the newspaper will look upon you with discontent for as long as they remember your name.

You'll have to go so far as to double-check even the most credible sources. O matter if they're an expert in their industry, if they give you a number for a specific bit of information, go the extra mile and verify the figures. Experts are not infallible, and you must make sure your information is 100% accurate.

If the story is regarding a specific position or person appointed within the company, go directly to the source for your information. Don't rely on the Vice President's secretary if they story is about the Vice President. Make an effort to contact he or she directly and get firsthand quotes for your story. Then, anything that might end up being misleading will come back to haunt the Vice President – not you or the paper.

Don't be afraid to approach your sources for clarification. If you find out that some of your facts contradict each other, go back to your sources and explain the situation to them. If a company is announcing that it will open up 100 new positions, but one source says it will be 1,000 – go back to the company and find out from the most authoritative source which number is correct.

If the information in your press release is of vital importance, you might want to check with several different sources from within the

organization. It couldn't hurt, and one source might end up mentioning a great reference for you to work with on other facts that could be included in your story.

Timeliness plays an important role in the integrity of your piece. If several months, or even days in some cases have passed, make a few phone calls to make sure your information is still accurate. It may be that the company has decided to move its new location to another city, and that's a pretty significant detail you'll need to know before it's published.

Consider how embarrassed certain media were when they announced that Al Gore had clinched the 2000 Presidency. Hours later, they had to retract that error, and became the target of comedy skits for months to come. Never release information before it is verified and true to the best of your knowledge.

You can use many different types of sources to gather your information, depending on the reason for your press release. Sometimes everything you need will be gathered in-house through company contacts, and sources they provide.

However, if you're doing a piece about the effect your company's new anti-pollution policy will have on the community, then it might be wise to do a little investigative research.

Find out what the current problem is, and how it's being dealt with. If the company is introducing a previously unheard of method to contain and dispose of waste products, then it might be wise to let them know that it will actually be solving a problem they might not even know existed. Your company will turn out to be a hero without having to write the press release in the form of a boasting, bragging document.

The public library is a wealth of *free* information that is available to everyone. Librarians are very resourceful in helping you find the information you need, so don't hesitate to ask if you find yourself stuck. The great thing about libraries is that they keep a great deal of information from a long time ago. So any facts you need are all at your fingertips. While you're there, be sure to study the exact media publications you're going to be targeting so that you have a feel for their style.

Don't limit yourself to the public library, though. There are plenty of other sources you can go to for the information you need. For instance, the company you're writing for, if it's a large corporation, probably has a in-house library, or records room at the very least. Find out if you're permitted to peruse those files and if so, you might be able to generate a stronger background on your subject matter.

Any universities that are in the area also probably have a variety of sources for your use, such as studies that have been conducted and reports that have been published. These can serve as a great authority basis for the groundwork of your press release.

Don't forget that libraries often have a link to other libraries in the district. If you have the time to wait, you can request that a source your library doesn't carry, be sent over to that location for your use. There usually isn't any charge for this, and it's a great way to expand your resource center. If there is a nominal charge for this service, weigh the cost of not having the source in your material, and that should tell you if it's worth the price.

If you are needing specific facts and figures, find the best almanac or reference book available to you. These contain almost every known piece of scientific information we have to date. If you use one, be sure to use the most recent edition, as population figures, and number counts can rapidly grow or decline in a short amount of time.

For geographical information, you'll want to source out the area's atlas or encyclopedia. Don't say the company headquarters are going to move to Arlington, if your national audience doesn't know if you mean Virginia or Texas.

If you're in need of statistical data, find out if you can utilize a current abstract. This uses sets of statistics and turns them into reader-friendly information that you can use to add credibility to your news item.

If using quotes in your work, you'll have to make sure that you attribute it to the right person. If you're dealing with a celebrity, you can look up their most famous quotes in *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*, or some other book of quotes that might be helpful.

Additionally, if you're quoting a source from the company you're working with, it might be wise to contact them before the press

release goes out, and read their quote back to them to make sure they agree with what it is *you* say they said.

Research doesn't end with library books and phone calls, however. The Freedom of Information Act allows for any citizen to obtain certain government information at their request. You have the right to use any non-classified documents at your disposal in your press release, and using a government study definitely adds an element of reliability to your piece.

Census data can come in very handy when a company wants to directly inform the readers how their product or service will affect the community in a positive manner. You can use census data that is compiled every ten years, or yearly, depending on the source you get it from.

If you have the need to find legal decisions to back up your information, you want to start with a publication such as the *Index to Legal Periodicals*. This will direct you on where to find the most accurate information and court decisions that relate to your subject matter.

Other government agencies, such as the Federal Bureau of Information (FBI), the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issue annual reports that come in handy when you need to find regional information that affects the audience.

With the technology available today, it's easy to enter your subject matter into an Internet search engine, and get back thousands of results with the lick of a button. Don't assume everything you see is accurate.

A website, unless an official state or other government agency site, cannot be considered accurate until you have produced a verifiable source. If "Andy's Website on Pollution" says that half of the country's water source is contaminated with e-coli bacteria, you don't want to consider Andy an accurate source unless you verify that he's the Director of Water Waste Management for the United States Government. Only then, can he be considered credible.

The Internet is a valuable source of leads, however. It can open up new questions that you hadn't previously thought to consider, and it can also point you in the direction of other lead sources who might

be able to provide accuracy and credibility to your piece. If you have a library that has a public online database, it's a great way of using the Internet and the library combined from the comfort of your own office (or home).

Interviews are another important part of researching your topic. Don't go into an interview without first thinking through your questions. The source you're meeting with (or talking to on the phone), doesn't have the time to waste waiting for you to fumble around with your notes and figure out what direction you want to take in your press release.

Sit down before the interview and consider the type of piece you're writing. Then, jot down some notes on importance aspects of the topic you wish to discuss with your source. Don't try to ask your source for "off the record" information. It will only make he or she nervous, and it feels like more of an interrogation than an interview.

Carry a mini-recorder with you to the interview for accuracy, and to make sure the meeting moves along quickly. Before you leave the office, make sure it has fresh batteries, but don't rely on a tape alone for the notes.

Write down as much information as you can, without making the source stop and wait for you. You don't want to have to call him back a day later asking him to repeat everything because your tape failed to record the conversation. It's unprofessional, and will make him leery of dealing with you in the future.

Some things you might want to clarify in your meeting with a source are:

- What exactly do you need to know? This is important because they might not know the reason for your interview, or the topic you'll be writing about.
- Why do you want to know this? Some information is rather sensitive, and sources might not want to divulge certain facts if they don't have to, or if it's not crucial to the topic.
- How are you going to use this information? Your source is going to be fuming if you use this information against him, so be upfront about how it will be used in your press release.

Before you go to the interview, do a bit of background research on your subject and the person you're going to meet with. It will help to know if he left a particular corporation because of their ethical standards being lower than his expectations, or if he had a dream of building his small entrepreneurial expedition into a world-wide venture.

If you run across some sensitive information that might be damaging to others, weigh the consequences of its use before you jump in and deliver it to the public's eyes. It's not always best to reveal everything you know without considering how it is going to affect others.

If you present your press release with a authoritative voice, and the editor knows that you've done your research, he or she will be appreciative of your effort, and may in turn ask you to write even more on the topic. Once they have worked with you, and verified your facts to be true and accurate, they'll be impressed enough to move your submission to the top of the ranks the next time you have information that needs to get in front of the eyes of the public.

If, however, you disregard Journalistic principals, and offer a document full of misleading information, or unreliable sources, the editor won't want to work with you in the future. It would be a waste of his time to have to re-interview, re-verify, and re-write your entire piece to a factual story he can actually print.

To write a successful press release, it takes a minimal amount of time to do the groundwork on which to lay your information. The further you go in making sure your piece has a newsworthy, *trustworthy* tone to it, the greater your chances of succeeding in a rewarding press release campaign.

Approaching Your Audience – *Writing From the Consumer's Point of View*

Writing a press release is a tricky combination of advertising and unbiased reporting. Somehow, you find yourself responsible for getting your company or clients name accepted by the media and in front of the public's eye.

The position you're in requires to accomplish two totally opposite tasks: Spin your story so that it projects a positive light on your client, and deliver a completely neutral news report to your media contacts.

All the while, you're expected to do both of these things at the greatest benefit to the intended audience. When people turn on the news on the radio or television, or pick up a paper, they're expecting quality, fair journalism and pertinent information about the events that are going to somehow affect them directly.

Now everyone's aware that certain editorial staff has their own slant on politics and world issues. But we all expect those opinions to stay on the editorial page, not find their way into the actual news that we're assuming to be true to the best of the publication's knowledge.

A press release is generally coming from a company or organization that has something to gain from the public knowing about its details. The only thing that will get your item into print is the level of worthiness it has to the target market.

The best way to determine the worth of your news is to look at it from the outsider's point of view. Try on the shoes of the average citizen in your community, and find what interests them and affects them the most. This is exactly what the publication's editor is concerned with, so do your research.

First you need to consider who it is that you're targeting. Are you announcing a new industrial plant that will open up 800 new jobs in the small community? Then your audience will be vast, requiring less research and specification on your part on how to approach them.

Are you holding a blood drive to help the local blood bank raise its dangerously low reserve levels? Then your target will be narrower. It will affect community-conscious individuals who are open to volunteering for this type of assistance.

Everything you write should somehow be connected to your audience. In order to accomplish this goal, you have to show and tell them how each and every detail will affect their lives either now, or in the future.

If you're writing a press release about a recipient of a local award, it will be great for the recipient, but makes little difference to the rest of the community as far as news is concerned.

Next, decide what key issues you want your audience to know and act upon. Do you want them to be aware of an upcoming development in the area? Or is the company trying to bolster its image with those who are already skeptical of them to begin with? Find one or more vital elements and focus on delivering those with a punch.

If the responsibility has landed upon you to simply gain coverage of the company, but you have no firm direction to work upon, then find out how many different paths your news could take, and then act upon the most influential ones, and those with the widest appeal.

If the client has many community activities throughout the year, and is launching products on a regular basis, choose which pieces of information are paramount, and then write about it, not all of your activities will be guaranteed space in the publication. In fact, keep in mind that editors can't give you your own client column each week, so pick and choose wisely on the topics you wish to send in.

If the company plans to release upcoming information about a new product or service they are offering, refrain from being too technical in your article. Keep the terminology simple, describing what the product or service will do, and how it will improve the reader's lives in some way.

Don't explain the details about how the statistical study's results led to an overhaul in the way you do business. Save that for your advertisements. Stick with the who, what, when, where and why, divulging the specifics of those questions, so you'll stay within the boundaries of need-to-know information.

The worst problem editor's encounter when sifting through the stack of soon-to-be discarded press releases sitting on top of their desk is that most simply aren't newsworthy. They lack all or most of the qualifications of being *news*: new, local, unique, relevant, and significant.

As the press release coordinator, it is your job to find the most newsworthy items your company is related to, and build on that topic. Certain items, such as the postal department's clerk being promoted to assistant delivery person, is simply more suitable for a company newsletter or other in-house publication source.

An editor is going to look at that piece of information and wonder, "Why is he (or she) sending *that* to *me*?" You've then succeeded in wasting his time, and possibly aggravating him – not something you want to do if you ever come upon a *really* vital tidbit that might actually be important in his eyes. If he remembers your first submission, he might toss it in the trash before he even spends one second looking at the title.

Consider the timeliness of your release to the public. Are you trying to report about your new resume writing services when the unemployment rate is at an all-time high? That could be construed as positive or negative, so spin it accordingly and in the best interest of the public.

Organize your message. Readers aren't going to be happy if your message jumps around the page without a central theme. You want each audience member to grasp the intended focus of your thoughts, not arrive at a variety of conclusions because you didn't develop your key ideas succinctly.

Bear in mind that your average news audience is middle aged, married, and a white-collar worker who normally spends 20-30 minutes a day focusing on the news. If a person reads one media form of news, it's likely that they also pay attention to other forms as well.

However, since the schedules of white-collar workers (and blue-collar as well) are overloaded these days, the news is normally consumed on the run. As such, if you write your press release in a confusing, or too-formal tone, the reader will quickly move on to another story and skip yours altogether.

Don't pile too much data onto your readers than they can handle. Your company might *want* to express twenty different things that are coming up in the near future, but the fewer items you put before your audience, the more likely they'll be to act upon them in a way that you hope they will.

It's not necessary to force the reader to search for clues about your message. It may seem cute, or stylish to write in a way that hints about several different topics, but keep in mind that your job is to deliver news, not a mystery. Your reader may end up frustrated and leave your article for a more organized one. Get to the point quickly, and add details later on.

Don't talk above your reader's head. There's no need to write using complicated words, such as "erroneous," when you could just say "wrong." Cater to education backgrounds of all levels. Remember – many schools use media publications as learning tools.

Simplify words, sentences, and paragraphs, but don't feel like you have to "dumb down" your news. Just avoid long, unfamiliar words that may make your reader pause for clarity.

Follow the mindset of Andy Rooney, whose commentaries are heard weekly near the end of each 60 Minutes segment. In his book, "Not That You Asked," Rooney says he's suspicious of writers who use words such as "laundry" when they mean "wash," or "inexpensive," when they mean "cheap." He's perplexed at how writers can't just be satisfied with the word "now," insisting upon using "currently," instead.

Avoid flowering your language so that each sentence overfills and drowns your reader. Shorter sentences are more powerful and catchy. Length does not guarantee a higher level of professionalism.

If anything, it detracts from it. Shorter sentences alleviate clutter, and relay your message to the audience faster. The more unnecessary words you eliminate, the better your chances of garnering the space you're competing for in each publication.

Watch carefully for any adjectives you use in your press release. Like any other news item, you're expected to send in an unbiased piece of information. Make sure you avoid writing words like "best," "only," "exciting," or "dull."

Instead of saying:

"The mayor lives in an expensive house."

Say:

"The mayor's house is estimated at \$500,000."

If you do have to include an opinion in your press release, usually at the request of your client, be sure to attribute it to someone other than the media publishing the story.

It's fine to say:

“This is by far the best product we’ve released to date,” said Corporation X’s Vice President, Steven Smith, of his company’s soon-to-be-launched software.

Refrain from stating it’s the *best* without using a specific quote.

Try not to alienate your audience. Don’t use stereotypes, whether they be sexual, ethnic, or otherwise. Aside from avoiding basic title taboos, such as mail**man**, fire**man**, etc., it’s also best to avoid touchy societal subjects.

These include reporting on a woman’s marital status or physical appearance. Always ask yourself if the same information would be relevant if you were reporting about a man. You don’t want to alienate half of your audience by unintentionally insulting them.

In review, write for your audience by following three basic guidelines:

- Write Simply
- Write Clearly
- Write Fairly

Ask yourself these questions to see if you’ve written from the consumer’s point of view:

- Is my press release easy to understand?
- Have I used any adjectives to describe the focus of my content?
- Are my employment titles gender-neutral?
- Have I geared the document towards a topic that most of the community will appreciate and want to read?
- Is my timing good - or bad - for disclosing this information?
- Have I answered all of the basic questions my audience is might have once they finish reading this piece?
- Is it clear to the reader who the source of this information is – so that if he or she wishes to learn more about the client, they’ll easily know who to contact?

- Have I written in a succinct manner so that the audience will be able to grasp the message without having to spend too much time deciphering it?
- Have I focused on the most pertinent information my client will want to pursue in the next six months to a year – not wasting editorial time with unimportant events?

If you've worked through all of the complexities above, then your press release should read like a true news story, and not resemble that of a biased, puff piece. If possible, have someone else take a look at the story and see if they notice any instances where it looks as if someone who works for the company or organization has written it.

Following these criteria will endear you to the community as an ethical and unbiased presenter of information. And it just might produce positive results for your press release campaign, too!

Tips of the Trade to Make Your Headlines Hook the Readers

There's a fine line between a lead, a headline, and a slug in the world of submitting your news information. For the purposes of a press release, the three items are basically one in the same, or at least, have the same affect as one another when put before an editor for consideration. If you're sending in your work with a stunning headline, be forewarned that the editorial department will probably change it before it hits the newsstands.

You can, however, tempt the editor into giving your press release heavier deliberation if you present him with a first impression that makes him curious about the rest of your story.

Let's break it down into three ways an editor might initially view your work:

1) Leading the Pack

A lead is the actually the first sentence of the main body of content in your story. It should be respected as the most powerful sentence on your paper, as it will almost single-handedly make or break your submission in one swift move.

There are crucial elements your lead must contain in order for it to achieve maximum effectiveness for your readers. Most editors will look at your lead, and from that, expect to know what your entire press release is about.

In order to accomplish this, you have to include the who, what, when, where, and why (or how) in that very first sentence, while maintaining the perfect balance between boring and information overload. There are two ways to form your lead sentence:

Instead of writing:

Dallas, TX –Corporation XYZ plans on giving a party for all of their employees to celebrate their recent success in the Greeting Card Industry. On March 11th, employees will be invited to the Hilton Hotel...

Try:

Dallas, TX – Corporation XYZ will celebrate their recent success in the Greeting Card industry by hosting a party for all 100 employees at the Hilton Hotel on Main Street at 8:00 PM March 11th.

This sentence covers the who (Corporation XYZ), what (a party), when (March 11th), where (Hilton Hotel on Main Street), and why (because of their recent success in the Greeting Card Industry). Don't make the information run into two separate sentences, as the first example showed. Tell the reader all of the main points in the lead sentence, and they will gather additional information in the body of the content.

Editors and readers alike will be able to tell from that one sentence whether or not you're a professional, and if your work deserves further time and consideration. If you fail to clarify your topic at hand, then the reader will move on to the next item that interests him.

Some writers prefer to start with their lead, devoting time and energy to polishing its form. But if you're having trouble developing a quality lead, put it aside and move on to the completion of the rest of your story first. Once you have the main body finished, it will be easier for you to gather the key issues and facts for your opening sentence.

Instead of writing a lengthy, all-inclusive lead sentence, try to include the most interesting facts in a punchy, appealing manner. This is the second method of developing your lead sentence – order of importance.

Once you figure out the who, what, when, where, and why, arrange that data in order of importance, and start your lead with the one word that stands out the most.

For example, instead of writing:

“In a party designed to celebrate the long-awaited success of Corporation XYZ, the company will honor its hard working employees with a celebration at the Hilton Hotel on March 11th.”

Start with one of the five W’s – more specifically, the most important W:

“Corporation XYZ will host a celebration at the Hilton Hotel on March 11th to honor their newfound success.

If you still feel that your lead sentence is not an item of excellence in your entire press release, but have tried revising it, without success, don’t resist sending it in as is, because the editor might give it his attention regardless, assuming he can alter the lead if necessary.

2) Extra! Extra! Read All About It! Headline Happiness...

A headline is usually an incomplete sentence that tops the story and stands out in bold print for the reader to see. It comes before the lead sentence in print, and normally doesn’t give a variety of facts, but instead offers a hint as to what the item is about.

For instance – A headline in a publication might read:

Example 1: “Two dead in ten car pile-up.” **or**

Example 2: “Boy recognized as local hero.”

Notice the lack of details in a headline format. The first example doesn’t tell where, when, or how it all happened. All you know is a basic who (not specific, because that will be divulged in the story itself), and what (a car accident).

Same with the second example. We don't know who the boy is, or where he hails from exactly, or why he's being recognized, or even when he became a hero. What we do know is that this is a positive story about a young male child who did something beneficial for his community, and is being awarded for it.

Headlines are what sell newspapers – the editors and other news staff will devise those. Your job is to sell your particular story to the reader. Since you have no control over the headlines, concentrate on working your content to the best possible format.

If you feel you must include a headline with your press release, then specify that it is tentative, showing that you understand that the publication might deem it necessary to alter it as they see fit.

When you send in your press release, your main objective should be to provide newsworthy information that the editor will view as imperative for their readers to know. The news staff will transform your release into a formula they learned when they studied Journalism in a formal education setting.

Many press releases gain a voice through the media regardless of the fact that they were sent in with an overtly biased tone, resembling an advertisement. Depending on the worthiness of the news, an editor and his staff might not discard your submission, or mind rewriting it, if the news will benefit the sale of their publication.

However, to increase your chances of acceptance, a strong intro, followed by a basic news format for the main content, will add strength and credibility to your submission.

3) Slugging to Sell

A slug is a bit of information that allows an editor to easily identify your piece. If the organization you're writing for is holding a fundraiser for needy families in the community, then the slug, which would appear in the upper left-hand corner of your paper, would read: Corporation XYZ Fundraiser. Nothing more. Nothing less.

Editors are bombarded with a barrage of press releases every day. They have to be able to quickly identify and sort through the items in order to rank them in order of importance for possible publication.

Obviously, a slug reading “Cash Found” will garner more interest than “New Lawn Company.” Finding the best possible slug for your story will allow the editor to add your piece to the higher-ranking items, but it’s important not to lie in order to trick the reader into continuing their time with your piece.

Not only will the editor call you on it if you attempt to make your story into something it’s not in your slug, headline, or lead intro, but assuming it does make it into print, past the watchful eye of the publication’s staff, the audience won’t be too happy when they think they’re about to spend time reading one thing, but find out it’s actually something completely different.

It might help to think of your lead as a summary of your entire story. Your press release is actually two items – the lead, and the body. The body is a fleshing out of the lead, which states the most important factors of the news piece itself.

As you write your press release, picture a pyramid. Many established reporters will tell you to use the pyramid as a method of developing your content. The lead is the first block on top. Everything after that follows on its way down in order of importance.

When the editor decides to use your press information, but learns that he only has a limited space to devote to your topic, he or she will tell the editorial staff to cut it from the bottom up. Therefore, put any information, which is expendable in the last paragraph of your press release.

Some editors might be wary of your work if your lead does not reflect the most important items in the rest of your press release. Make sure that you include those bits and pieces of greatest value in the lead, followed by a more in-depth explanation in the body of your content.

Things to Avoid

There are a variety of ways to form the intro to your press release. Aside from the guidelines already mentioned, it’s best to avoid ever starting your piece with a question. An interrogative lead is never a professional way to write news.

Although you might feel that it piques the reader's curiosity, all it will do is waste the reader's time, and that will cause them to skip your item altogether. Don't say "Will the PTA raise enough funds to buy new computers for the school" when you can say "The PTA will hold a fundraiser Monday night in an attempt to provide the school with all new computers."

Additionally, don't try to cram everything into one sentence if it seems to overload the information. If the five W's won't fit gracefully into the first sentence, then cut out the least important information, and save it for the second sentence. There is no need to practice deliberate overkill just to follow news formatting.

Just as you shouldn't lead with a question, you also should never lead with a negative sentence. If the PTA meeting was rained out, don't write "The PTA did not have its meeting Monday night due to bad weather." Say, "Rain spoiled the fundraising efforts of the PTA Monday night..." Or, even better, if something is going to replace the thing that did not happen, mention that first: for example – "The PTA will hold a meeting Tuesday night to take the place of Monday night's meeting, which was rained out."

Checklist for Intro

- Have I used, but not forced my five W's into my lead?
- Is my lead clear, concise, and positive?
- Is my lead appropriate in length, or have I tried to include too much information?
- Does my lead reflect the most important ideas based on the content of the body of my press release?
- Have I started with the most important information, and methodically mentioned less relevant points as the item progressed?
- Does my lead reflect matters of substance, or have I over-generalized?
- Does my lead answer to the broadest possible audience, or does it cater to one specific group in particular?

Everyone is different when it comes to developing his or her own leads. Some prefer to write the lead first, and then flesh out the story

so that it's centered around the lead. And some prefer to write the story first, including all of the relevant facts, followed by writing a lead that is all-inclusive of their prewritten information.

Whichever method you choose, try to follow the basic rules in leads, headlines, and slugs. Include the most important facts, write with clarity and value in mind, and try to target as many people as possible with your intro sentence.

The wider your appeal, the more likely an editor will be to want to include your work in his publication. The more people you cater to, the more people that will purchase his publication.

Destination: Information!
Covering the Who, What, When, Where, & Why In Your Content

By now you probably have a good idea of what your topic is about, and how to write it for the eyes and ears of your audience. Now comes the easiest part of developing your press release – the main content.

It doesn't matter if your client is wanting press for an event, product, or service – the formula remains the same. As mentioned in a previous chapter, you'll need to sit down and detail the Five W's of your subject. Who? What? When? Where? Why? (Or How, if Why isn't applicable).

Once you know the basic answers to these questions, and arrange them in order of importance in your lead sentence, you'll want to follow that order when fleshing out your story. If the Where is ultimately more important than the Who, then start with the Where first.

For our example here, let's assume they rank in order as it appears above. Now, we can approach each issue and learn how to make the most out of each answer.

The Who

Normally, this is the most important factor that your audience will be concerned with. If a product is launching, they want to know who's putting it out – Microsoft, or Sam's Software? If a fundraiser is being organized – is it for the Democratic, or Republican Party candidates?

Answering the Who is perhaps the easiest item to detail. There are concrete facts and data about the Who – their name, location of headquarters, size of the company or organizations – all of the facts that make up who they are as an organization.

More specifically, the Who of a company also entails the individual people associated with it. Everyone from the maintenance worker to the CEO has a vested interest in what goes on in, and what happens to, the company.

In a press release, it's important to hear directly from those who initiated the news in the first place. Did the President of the Company sign a deal to add 1,500 jobs to the workforce? Then quote him on the *Why* and *When* the jobs will materialize.

Has a local volunteer for your organization raised an important sum of money, or is she *trying* to for a specific cause? Highlight her in the story, attributing quotes to her as well in order to add credibility, and a human element to the piece.

The What

What is happening? Is it happening *to* someone? Then the audience needs to know. Is your organization fighting to save a homeless shelter from being destroyed for a new parking lot? Items that affect others are of great interest to all of us – even if we're not directly involved.

When writing about the What of a topic, you're usually talking about a verb. Something is happening, will happen, or did happen. Whenever possible, use an active verb instead of a passive one. For example:

Instead of saying:

"XYZ will hold a meeting Monday night."

Say:

"XYZ will meet Monday night."

And always avoid prepositional phrases whenever possible. Don't say "Mr. Doe, the Vice President of XYZ Corporation, says..." Simplify it by writing "XYZ Vice President Doe says..."

When the client has many possible "Whats" coming up, don't try to cram them all into one press release. Meet with them and try to find a balance between what *they* think is most important, and what an *editor* would want to see based on audience appeal. Point out to your client that not everything they send in is going to be published in all likelihood.

You don't want to write a press release telling the public that John Doe was promoted to CEO, **and** the company is opening a new plant soon, **and** they're having a picnic that will open to the public, **and** it happens to fall right around the time the new product is being introduced.

This isn't destination – information, it's information overload! Your readers will walk away dazed and confused about what they just read – unsure of what the intended message was because of its jumbled nature. Focus on the best points, and stick to them!

The What in your story is the item you want your reader to act upon. Fundraising? You want donations. New product or services? You're looking for a sale. New jobs? Get those applicants in the door, not to mention grab some positive public relations for your press for your client.

For the What answer, use the most interesting angle to your audience. If an 89-year old volunteer is devoting sixty hours a week to raise money so that the organization can purchase enough turkey's so that every needy family can celebrate Thanksgiving, center your piece around her, not the organization itself. The press release will still get its message across – that they should help her meet her goals, and you will have used a human-interest angle to do it.

The When

Timeliness is everything (well, almost everything) to the editor you're approaching with your press release. First, he's going to make sure your subject is audience appealing. But second, he wants to know if it's relevant at this time.

Always report on events or products as close to the release date or launch date as possible. Give the editor enough time to review the press release, and revise it, so that he can publish it the day before or the day of your event.

Don't send in an announcement that tells his readers that last month, the organization raised enough money to buy a new computer. Timeliness would require you to announce that particular bit of information *as you're trying to raise funds.*

Same with products and services. Don't try to have a publication tell its audience that your client released two new items *last year.* Alternately, editors don't want to announce something that's too far down the road, either. Save your impending news for a time when it's going to actually affect the readers.

Keep in mind the question "What have you done for me lately?" That question answers that type of information an editor is seeking. While you want to be specific in telling the audience *when* something is going to happen, don't feel you have to go into too much detail. If a meeting will be held Monday night, August 6th, at 8:15 pm, simply write it as: Monday the 6th, at 8:15 pm.

If a product is being launched, stick to the day, month, and year. Unless it's an item that customer's are going to line up for at a retailer's door in the wee morning hours, it's not necessary to tell the exact time you plan to put the product on the shelves.

If the When in your story would nicely complement another community event, try to arrange with the client to ensure that the two happenings coincide if at all possible. For instance, if a highly publicized rodeo is coming to town in November, ask your client if it's feasible to shoot for a launch date of October for his new line of leather apparel.

Any edge you can use to leverage the power of the press in your favor is worth considering when the publishing of your press release is like getting free advertising space in the publication.

The Where

Another important aspect the editor is going to look for in your press release is does it concern his readers? Localization is an important factor in getting your news out to the public.

If your company is opening a new office, 1,000 miles away, chances are, the readers are going to say, "So what?" But if the current office, located in their town, is *moving* to another city 1,000 miles away, thus increasing the unemployment rate dramatically, it becomes instant news.

It is possible for news to happen elsewhere, and still affect the local community. If your company's headquarters located across the country, held a blood drive that found a match for a rare blood type that is going to save a local girl's life, it's newsworthy.

The closer your news hits home, the greater its chances of being published, and maintaining interest among your audience. Even if the news itself isn't localized, try to attach some sort of local angle to it.

If the event is happening elsewhere, and the event itself is the main news, state that first, but don't bury the fact that it's also going to affect those in the community. Bring that information to the forefront, directly after the What of your story. For example:

XYZ Corporation (who) has been sold to its sister company in Japan (what), resulting in ten domestic plants shutting their doors, including the one here in X City (where).

The main news is that the company has been sold and that most of the domestic plants will close. But by adding the fact that their own plant will close as well, you've succeeded in localizing the news for your audience.

Many press releases will not have a specific local angle at all, and that's fine as long as it will still somehow be of interest to the publications' readers. If your client is a household name, and something big is about to happen, they want to know about it just like the rest of the country.

If, however, your client is opening a franchise in another town, hundreds of miles away, and it has no visible effect on your immediate community, send your press release to the editor of the primary publication in the *new* location for maximum coverage.

The Why (or How)

Often, the Why (or How) is the first item to be trimmed from the press release if it isn't relevant to the rest of the story. So how do you know what should and should not be explained?

Look at it from a reader's point of view. If a company is hiring 20,000 new employees, and all you know is it's "because the President of the Company said so," either contact him for a more in-depth explanation, or forgo it altogether.

Most of the time, the press release will offer an explanation as to why an event is occurring.

"The PTA (who) is accepting donations (what) to raise money for a new library (why)."

or

"The PTA (who) is trying to raise funds for a new library (what) by having a bake sale (how)."

How comes into affect much more prominently when the audience is supposed to act upon the information. You want to tell them how they can help, how they can participate to bring about positive change in their community, how they can make a difference.

Once you master the Who, What, When, Where, and Why of your press release, you can begin to revise it and tighten the wording so that it appears to be reader friendly, while ensuring that all of the questions your readers will want to know have been answered.

As a review, develop your content in this order:

- Write down the answers to the Five W's.
- Arrange the W's in order of importance.

- After writing your lead, start to flesh out the answers in more detail.
- Be as detailed as you need to be without congesting the content.
- Write your text so that it provides a way the reader can take action.

The editor of each publication will most likely rewrite some or all of your content, so your job is to provide him with the finest story you can, so that you lessen his workload and ensure the most important facts (to your client) make it into the publication. Write, Rewrite, and then Review.

Tempting With Teasers – *A Tantalizing Taste of the “Less-Is-More” Theory*

If there’s one thing an editor hates to read, it’s a dull press release that rambles on about unimportant information. Your primary function as a direct extension of the news staff is to relay significant news to the editor so that he or she can pass it along to their readers.

However, the content you send should not only be worthy of valuable space in the publication, but should also include an irresistible factor as well. Making your news alluring can be done in two different ways. Either the information alone is something the audience can’t live without knowing, or you make it *seem* that way.

News that stands on its own two feet is of paramount concern to the entire community. This includes national coverage of worldwide issues, and major tragedies and triumphs. A lawsuit involving Sam’s Software *might* be interesting to the local consumers, but a lawsuit against Microsoft *will* be of great interest.

Why? Because Microsoft produces a product that is internationally utilized in almost every business in the world. Sam’s Software doesn’t have the recognition that Microsoft does.

If your client’s news isn’t exactly a top-of-the-hour headline, you’ll need to draw your audience into your world, where the news you’re presenting *is* of utmost importance. How can you do this?

By tempting your readers into learning more. You don't do this by giving them a "shotgun" lead, as it's known throughout the Journalism field. A shotgun lead is a method of introduction for a story where the writer immediately tries to cram as much information as he can into the very first sentence.

In this instance, the reader might as well stop reading after that first sentence, since you've already placed your cards on the table. While you want to tempt your reader, you also want to avoid delaying relevant information by asking them a question. Unless the publication is a lighthearted, human-interest outlet, then it's best to avoid question leads in a news publication.

To offer your audience a more thrilling read, try using a suspenseful lead to lure them into the rest of the text. But to do this, you must maintain an honest approach and a high degree of integrity.

For example:

"Sheriff Patterson realized Monday morning, that something was amiss, when he answered a call from a two-year old Labrador Retriever."

This lead hints at the events that took place, and makes the reader want to continue to find out *how* a dog called the police station, *why* it called, and what happened *after* Sheriff Patterson answered the phone.

If you were writing it as a shotgun lead, it might read like this:

"Sheriff Patterson received a call Monday morning from a Labrador Retriever, who was trained to push the automatic 911 button on its owner's phone."

A lead like this tells us that the dog was trained prior to the event, on how to dial the emergency number, so chances are, the owner had an on-going ailment of some sort. A reader *might* continue on to find out what happened, but it's pretty much all summed up in the first sentence. It's just a matter of whether or not you want to read a story about a canine hero.

The "Less-Is-More" theory doesn't necessarily mean fewer words – just less information. Of course, it's always good to keep your verbiage down to a minimum for the editor's sake, and to increase

your chances of publication. But less *information* means teasing your audience with good things to come.

Another method of luring the reader into devouring your story is by shock value. This doesn't mean offensive, just shocking. There's a difference between the two that is as important as any other factor in developing your press release.

Offensive would be anything your audience would possibly be angry with you for printing, such as explicit language or graphic details or pictures. You'll notice in your local paper, if a story is written about a crime or particularly gruesome accident, a warning will precede the article.

This warns readers of vivid details, so that if they prefer to skip that information, they can. It's better to forewarn your audience, rather than sneaking the text in, and then hearing about it later.

Some publications and news shows, unintentionally offend their viewers by reporting on a community's dislike for a certain establishment, for instance, while showing graphic scenes directly into the homes of the viewer.

Shocking, on the other hand, heightens the reader's initial reaction, but explains the information throughout the rest of the story. A shocking example might be the following:

"Ten high school students were pulled from the wreckage of an overturned truck Tuesday morning, as firefighters scrambled to bring them to safety."

"I loved it," said Jessica Smith, her head encased in a thick bed of bandages.

The reader is thinking – "She *loved* it?" But the next sentence goes on to say...

"The Mothers Against Drunk Drivers Association sponsored the event, which demonstrates how drinking and driving affects al of those around us."

Ah. Now the reader knows the event was a hoax. No children were really injured, and we can see how Jessica would be enthusiastic about participating in such an impacting display.

You do have to be careful when working with teaser leads, however. Sometimes they can backfire. If your reader is in a hurry, he or she might be irritated that they wasted even a few valuable seconds on a false setup.

Others will be grateful for the deviation from the standard news format, and will appreciate the relief that comes from knowing it wasn't a bad accident after all. Look to your intended media target to find out what lead style the editorial staff prefers, or adheres to.

If you don't see any leeway from the basic factual lead intro, then stay with what works for that particular publication. In the example above, you would rephrase it to read:

"Mothers Against Drunk Drivers sponsored a lifelike wreckage scene at Cross County High School Tuesday morning to demonstrate the ill effects of drinking and driving."

Whatever method you use to entice your audience into reading the rest of your story, do it fairly and honestly. Don't trick a reader into thinking a story is about *one* subject, only to have them discover it's really about something totally different.

Make your teaser intrigue and attract readers, but stay away from misleading them or giving away too much information on your news from the beginning. Give it an unexpected twist or turn to add a bit of the unexpected to your piece.

Your teaser should prepare the audience for what's to come. Never start your piece in a positive light, only to take a dark tone later on in the body of the press release. An example of this might be:

"Patterson Industries will open a new location on the East Coast this summer. Unfortunately, this means 15,000 jobs will disappear from our county in late August."

Tell your readers from the start if the news is good or bad - especially if it has a profound impact on the lives of the citizens who are reading it.

Your intro should indicate the tone of the piece following the first sentence. A teaser can be introduced at any point in the story, but the text following it should directly relate back to the teaser.

Don't open with a teaser and then not explain it until three paragraphs later. Your reader will be frustrated trying to find the information, or lost once he stumbles upon it, and can't recall what it's referring to.

This is called a trick lead, and your audience will hate you for it. The premise here is that if you tempt them right away, then they'll be willing to read the rest of the story just to find out three-quarters of the way down the page, what they *thought* they were going to find out in the beginning.

It defers crucial facts, and shouldn't be used to enhance your message. It might end up bringing you a disaster.

The "Less-Is-More" theory can best be effectively used if you can find a unique method of enticing your audience, but immediately following, answer the riddle you placed before them. It breaks the monotony of the standard news format, but quenches their desire for the basic facts.

Your intentions in writing a provocative teaser are to try to make the reader choose your story over someone else's, and to spend some time in your story before they leave. On average, readers spend only 20-30 minutes per day consuming news.

Break that down to each section they open, and every page, and the chances of them actually reading your entire story are slim to none at best. Make sure you follow the guidelines below to increase the stretch of time readers spend learning more about your article's contents.

- Do I have a unique angle to offer my readers?
- Have I given everything away from the beginning, or is there more to tell once they sit down with the bulk of my content?
- Is my intro offensive to any group of people?
- Does my intro lead the reader to the next sentence, or halfway down the page?
- Have I made my intro as interesting as possible, while focusing on the main idea of my story?

- Did I mislead the readers, or does my intro accurately reflect what it's about?

If your press release allows for a minimal amount of teaser touting, your readership will increase as the audience anxiously awaits your next bit of information. If you overdo it, though, they might view you as someone who doesn't provide them with professional news quickly enough.

Tantalizing teasers have more to do with how you present your information than what your information actually *is*. The bad thing is, you don't really have control over how your ideas are ultimately presented to the audience.

The editor of the publication has full control over that. And he or she will ensure that the publication is uniform in how it delivers its news to the public. Your most valuable source of direction, then, is to get a hold of an actual recent publication, and write your intros in the same format.

This development also has a lot to do with what medium you choose to send your press release to. If it's the newspaper, chances are, they'll follow the basic Five W format of leading into a story.

However, if the release is being sent to a local television station, the producers will almost definitely lead with a teaser. They'll tempt the audience right before a commercial, hoping they don't change channels in the meantime, and then again once they return from their break, as they dive into the story itself.

One difference between the paper media and print media is the way they promote their stories. In a paper, the headlines are front and center – readily available as the very first thing a reader sees and consumes.

But in a news show on television, the best is saved for last. Time after time, you'll hear the broadcaster say, "Coming up next," but next doesn't happen until 55 minutes into the show. It's a way to make sure you stick with their channel, and they do it because they can.

A paper makes its money selling advertisements no matter what. Once the paper is sold, it's a done deal. But a broadcast station has to

keep you tuned in for the entire timeslot so that you'll see their advertiser's commercials.

Use your teasers sparingly, but effectively, and you'll find the public has fun with your piece, and might take the action you desire on your product or services. If you feel better sticking with what's safe, then adhere to the Five W's, and allow the editor to come up with a more enticing lead.

Formatting Fundamentals – *Following the Rules of Conformity*

Each and every day, you follow certain formatting criteria. Whether you're jotting down a note to a family member, or sending an email to your boss, you probably follow some general method of placing and styling your words.

Most media departments require their reporters and freelancers to follow particular guidelines for submissions before they will even consider reviewing your work. In fact, most are so eager to ensure that everything stays within their procedures, that they will send you a copy of their guidelines, or a stylebook, for *free!*

Additionally, most media will send you a sample of their publication for a nominal fee, along with the guidelines. If you look in any Writer's Market, which includes submission rules for almost every print media in existence, you'll find that most *strongly suggest* that you send off for their guidelines, and review a current copy of the publication, before you put your ideas in the mail.

The same holds true for any press release. Even though it is a news item, presumably void of any boasting or advertising mechanisms, each publication will have its own style and tone of writing the news.

A stylebook will answer any questions you have as to the publication's preferred way of writing. It will tell you if the editor wants the number twelve written in word form, or numbers (12). It will inform you as to whether or not possible compound words are to be combined, or hyphenated.

A stylebook also addresses specific word choice questions that will tell you if the targeted media fancies the word Vietnam or the

words Viet Nam. It tackles issues such as capitalization, title specifics, time, dates, and names.

Even if a publication doesn't have any required formatting guidelines, be sure to adhere to some type of professional style, so that your submission will project a more qualified appearance.

Here are some indispensable rules of conformity that will ensure you have the basics down before you launch your press release campaign into existence:

1) *Disclosing the Deliveries*

Whether it's an article or a press release, the media want to be the first to receive and dispense of the news. One very important aspect in delivering your release is to state on the cover whether or not you have simultaneously submitted your information.

No publication wants to print the same item that another one is printing at the same time, or worse, *before* them. The idea behind the media is to be the first, and be the best. Depending on whom you talk to, you'll find that normally, it's perfectly fine to send in your item to more than one publication, *as long as you disclose it*. That way, you're giving ample notice to the recipients that they might want to find out if another source has published it first.

The news industry is highly competitive, and as such, you have a responsibility to adhere to their courtesies as well as their formatting principals. Some may insist on being the sole addressee for your item. If so, weigh the options you have, and decide if it's best to stick to a sole source, or submit it to more than one publication. Whatever you do, do *not* lie to them and sneak off additional copies to their competitors. If word gets back to the original source, you can count yourself (and the company for which you're writing), out of any future publishing credentials with that particular media.

If you find that your news item is one that should be submitted to only one source at a time, then prepare a list, in order of importance, of whom you wish to have first dibs on your publishing rights. Once you hear back from each source, feel free to submit it to the next in line.

Sometimes, this may not be practical, if the information is of a timely nature. Always include a SASE (Self Addressed Stamped

Envelope) to each publication, so that you'll get a response. Not all editors will waste their own materials in getting back to you.

Additionally, some media will be very receptive to the idea of your submitting the story to two different forms of media outlets. Most print publications will be content if you send one copy to the local state paper, and another to the top radio station in your area.

2) *Perfect Your Timing*

When delivering a press release to the media, it's very important to ensure your timing is perfect. Not only when the paper or other form of media might have the best use for it, but also what works for your news.

If the company that's hired you is launching a new website or product on July 31st, don't wait until that day to send in your press release. Send it in early enough so that the editor has plenty of time to decide if he wants to use the story on the day of, or the day before, the debut. The editor may need time to verify your facts and sources, or simply rewrite certain parts of your press release to conform to their own style and format.

Since you never know what the editor will decide, avoid using terms like "today," or "tomorrow," in your submission. Instead, use specific dates, such as March 3. If you're not sure what the typical lead time is, in other words, how far in advance the editor prefers to have the story in his hands, make a quick call and find out. Most staff members are very familiar with the deadlines and turnaround time the paper needs to develop its stories.

3) *Give Me My Space, Please!*

Scientists say that humans need at least three feet of personal space to be at a maximum comfort level. Well, press releases need space, too! It may seem excessive when printed out on paper, but an editor will greatly appreciate it if you format your page so that it allows for double, if not, triple spacing.

When an editor receives your story, reviews it, and decides that he wants to look into it further, he needs to have space on your printed copy to make notes, changes, and additions to your work. Your paperwork will probably be moving between personnel, so it's a great idea to give them room to work!

Paper quality should be considered as well. Use a standard white 8 ½ - by - 11-inch high quality bond paper. Type your submission in 12-point font, in a style that is easy to read, such as Times New Roman. Print your press release on a desk-jet or laser quality printer for the best appearance.

Position your story a third of the way down the page, after presenting your contact information, headings, and specific dates. Once you begin your main content, make sure you left-justify your work so that the editor has room in the right margin to make further notations, if necessary.

Always maintain at least a one-inch margin on every edge of the paper. If your press release has more than one page, be sure to write "continued," or "more," at the bottom of each previous page.

If you do wind up with more than one page, be sure to identify your work on each additional page by writing your last name, and the title of the story in the upper left-hand corner. If you want to, you can also number the pages, beginning on page two of your submission.

When you have more than one page, *use* more than one page to print on! Never send your work printed on both sides of the paper. And remember, as netiquette rules suggest, never type in all capital letters. It's considered shouting, and for print work, it makes it difficult to read. Stick to the elementary formatting, and you'll keep the editor's eyes happy.

4) *Crossing Your "t's" and Dotting Your "i's"*

Some things to double-check before you submit your work for publication:

- Did I use the right tense and keep it uniform throughout the press release? Try to keep your press release in the Active voice. Instead of using the Passive voice, saying: "A meeting will be held on Monday night," try using "The organization will meet on Monday night."
- Are my abbreviations, if used, correct? Many organizations use acronyms, so the media have devised a way to employ the practice in their reporting. The general rule is to completely spell out the name on the initial reference, such as: Federal Bureau of Investigation, followed by the acronym FBI in any following mentions of the organization throughout the story.
- Have I capitalized Proper nouns and brand names? Always avoid capitalizing any words that do not require it. Use capitals for proper nouns, names, and specific popular areas that the community will generally understand as being a certain region.
- Are any numbers, lower than 10 spelled out in word form? One rule of thumb for numerical references is that very small and very large numbers are never written in figure format. Instead of writing "1" you would write "one." And you would refer to fifteen thousand in word form, not as 15,000.
- Have I excluded the use of any time specific words, such as "today" or "tomorrow?" If you accidentally include the use of one of these types of words, it will usually be eliminated from the content. The only time it is appropriate to use these is when a media sector is speaking of something that has already happened. Normally, this occurs in an afternoon paper, which reports on the happenings that took place earlier in the day.
- Are my courtesy titles for each person mentioned in my press release correct? For example, am I correct in assuming it is "Mrs." instead of Ms? Most media do not even use courtesy titles at this date, preferring instead to simply refer to the person as "Jane Doe," initially, and "Doe" from that point on in the story. But, depending on your target media's guidelines, you'll need to make sure that if you did use courtesy titles, that you've used them properly.

- Have I omitted any use of sexist language, such as police **man** or fire **man**, and instead, made them gender-neutral? Traditionally, certain jobs were gender-specific, such as those on the police force or fire fighting staff. Now, a firefighter can be male or female, so the title has evolved to reflect the new change.
- Have I succeeded in not using any words of fluff that would make my work appear to be biased to the public, such as “best,” or “wonderful?” One of the biggest mistakes public relations departments make when submitting a press release, in hopes of getting news coverage, is in turning their “news” into an “advertisement.” Look at your press release from the public viewpoint, and see if you think they might misconstrue any information you’ve added to look unbiased in their eyes.
- Is my work addressed to the correct personnel, and furthermore, is my own contact information correct? One critical mistake some inexperienced writers make is addressing their work to the wrong personnel. Worse, some even send it to a staff member who hasn’t worked for the publication in years! An editor can only assume your work is sloppy if you fail to make a quick phone call to verify your contact information.
- Have I used my spell-checker, and then reviewed the document with my own eyes for proper word usage? Be sure to watch out for words that the computerized spell-checker might not catch. If you wish to say, “**For** the next two years,” make sure it doesn’t read “**Four** the next two years.” Have another person read your press release before sending it in, to catch any errors that you might fail to spot.

5) *Wrap It Up!*

Formatting doesn’t end with font styles and page settings. Sending in your submission has a rule of its own, and everyone should follow the basic procedure courtesies.

If your press release is more than one page in length, never ever staple your pages together. Either number your pages with proper

identification (in case any page gets separated from the others), or use a paper clip to fasten them to one another. A staple is only going to make the editor either rip the pages apart, or go through the hassle of trying to find a staple remover on his already-cluttered desk of unsolicited submissions.

There is no need to send your work in any fancy method. Unless it's a time-sensitive piece, don't use overnight carriers that will require personnel-specific signatures. Simply use standard sized packaging, and refrain from writing messages on the outside of the envelope – it either won't be read, or it will make an unprofessional impression.

Proper formatting is the easiest way to gain the trust of an editor. If everything looks good from first glance, then he or she is going to march forward in giving your document a careful consideration on whether or not they wish to include your work in an upcoming issue.

Press Release Placement – ***Finding the Perfect Medium***

Finding the perfect medium for your press release is as simple as figuring out your target market. The god thing about a press release is that it can take many different forms and be sent to a variety of media outlets.

Here, we'll address the various forms of media, and how they might benefit your organization's ultimate goals and strategies.

Newspaper

This is the source most people think of when we speak about submitting a press release. It's the oldest form of communication in civilized societies across the world. Some people think the newspaper is a widely outdated form of communication, and that the number of readers diminishing will ultimately be the downfall of the paper entirely.

There are many different forms of newspapers depending on the region you're seeking to publish in. If your client is large enough, like IBM or Starbucks, then you have a chance at making national headlines when you have something of importance to say that will affect the country's readership.

If you are able to send press information to one of the national publications, such as USA Today, or possibly a city-specific paper that has a national following, such as the Washington Post or New York Times, chances are, someone on their staff already has their eye on *you*. The sooner you form an amicable relationship with one of the staff, the more smoothly your press release will be processed in the news department.

The Associated Press (AP) is the main conglomerate when it comes to media publication. Almost every paper in the country, from large nationwide papers, to small community setups, has a direct link to the AP for the most prominent news available. If the story you're delivering has local implications, you can look up the AP bureau for your state in the state's capitol.

However, if your client has impending information that is suitable for national headlines, you can send your press release to AP's General/National Desk or International Desk at Associated Press, 50 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N.Y. 10020. This news wire feeds 24 hours a day into most news departments around the world, so your item, if applicable to their audience, will be picked up immediately.

Of course, if you only have reason to publish your client's press in the local paper, by all means, send it to the correct editor of that publication first. Most larger newspapers are now published free online, in addition to their print counterparts, so don't be disappointed by the statistics that warn of the decline of print journalism. It isn't going anywhere anytime soon.

Television

Perhaps the most influential of all media sources, television allows its audience to experience news in the most realistic way. When we turn on the TV, a reporter stands in the midst of the scene, allowing us to hear, see, and feel (emotionally) what is going on around him.

His description of the events cannot compare to what our own eyes and ears consume. Thankfully, news shows don't *only* have to report on the worst life has to offer. They bring us the news about everything that will directly impact our lives for the better or worse in the timeliest fashion.

Like an editor, a producer will be the one who decides what is newsworthy to his audience. But for a producer, the value doesn't end there. A producer wants to know if there is live footage he can shoot when the report is brought to the eyes of the public.

Is there any way for him to directly interview one of your contact sources for his show? Even better, can it be an exclusive? News competition is fierce, with some starting their broadcast earlier than others, just to be the first to bring you the information.

Local news is dramatically different from cable news channels. Stations such as CNN, a 24-hour news source headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia, that has up-to-the-minute coverage of everything from International terrorism to sports and entertainment, are strong competition for local channels. If your news makes it on CNN, chances are, it'll be on your local channel later that evening.

Like the newspaper outlet, television stations have current, constantly-updated Internet websites devoted to keeping their customer's informed at all times. If your press release makes it to the news, then it will also probably be included on their main website as well.

Since the producers are trying to keep their audience tuned in to see their advertisers, the press release introductions they receive will be written in a completely different style than the print form. In a print form, you have to get to the point quickly, in order to maintain your reader's interest, and keep them tuned into your message.

The opposite is true for a television broadcast. It's unlikely that any reporter is going to tell you all of the facts in their very first sentence, when they could string you along for the rest of the broadcast.

The producers are much more concerned with the live feed going into your home than they are the actual content, although that, too, is of great importance. A producer's job is to bring the news to the public in an interesting, aesthetically pleasing method. So he has to concentrate on putting a scene together with your content.

Internet

The Internet, as we've already seen has a tremendous impact on the reach of the media. Not only do traditional media outlets utilize the far-reaching grasp of the Internet to feed their audience on a constant basis, but there are thousands of other Internet-based organizations that provide the public with information without the means of print or video feed.

One good place to start is with each Internet Service Provider (ISP) that you can think of. For instance, when a member signs onto America Online (AOL), the first screen to pop up is an interactive news source. Usually, they tend to concentrate on entertainment, but that all depends on which Service Provider you're targeting.

MSN.com, for instance, greets its members with the latest interesting news feature. And from there, members can click on the item of choice that interests them, therefore, customizing their news.

More and more sites now offer a running banner of news for their customers, feeding our insatiable appetite for live feeds into the most fascinating aspects of our world.

The Internet not only provides you with a basic format to spread the word of your news, but it allows you to present that information in a variety of ways. Text is almost always accompanied by another means of communication, such as audio or video stream, graphics, or pictures.

This method of media distribution means your viewers will be able to learn more with the click of a button. You can link them back to your website, where it's a good idea to store a page of recent press release information, or other announcements. Or, provide your viewers a chat or message area so that you can gage the consumer's reaction to your press release on the spot.

In order to participate at the maximum capacity in the Internet world of news, it's best if you stay up-to-date on your technology and cater your news to the people who might be viewing it online – educated, white-collar workers who are looking for fast information, with a high-quality feel to it.

If you're technology-impaired, now is the time to sign up for a class and learn the ins and outs of basic Internet communication. The World Wide Web is a vast source of communication outlets that lets you reach an unlimited audience within seconds.

Magazines

Magazines, like any other media outlet, have their own rules and guidelines for submission, and they cringe whenever you embark on a path that deviates from their cause.

If you're a public relations official, you're probably used to creating a basic press release in an effort to notify the editor of your news, and let him take it from there. However, submitting your information to a magazine is more like crafting an article as an outsider.

With a press release, you're probably targeting a trade magazine – some specific publication that caters to a specialized topic of interest. For instance, if your client is about to launch a new convertible solar powered car, you'll want to send it to an automobile trade magazine, not *Woman's Weekly*.

When you make the decision to submit to a magazine of *any* kind, go out and purchase the writer's must-have guide – the *Writer's Market*. This book is updated each year to contain almost every listing you can imagine for publishers, agents, and your target – magazines.

Each year, the magazines receive a questionnaire from *Writer's Market*, which they then complete and return to the book's publishers. At press time, the magazines are divided into categories such as *Women's*, *Trade*, *Romance*, *Mystery*, etc. You simply flip to the genre of your choice, and there it will tell you all of the guidelines to follow when submitting your information.

Since magazines are looking for articles, it's great if you can simply query them with an already-completed article about the new product or service your client is offering. Like newspapers, a magazine won't be interested in an advertisement that reads, "Try the **best** face cream ever invented!" They have an ad department for this type of content, and they charge heavily for it.

Instead, approach it as a consumer-informative document. Do some research, compare it to the other products, but don't lie about

the results. The magazine probably has a fact-checking department that will call your bluff if you provide false information, and they may even include you in a negative article if you try anything tricky.

The most important thing to remember when approaching a magazine is *know your target!* Do not write them a stuffy business-like article if they speak in slang and poke fun of society. Request a back issue, or study their current publication to get a feel for their tone and style.

Then, make sure your idea hasn't been done before – or least, recently. If your organization is doing something beneficial for the community, such as building a home for a family who lost everything, angle your story around a person who is organizing the campaign, and send it in as a human-interest piece.

Radio

Radio is a great way for your company to get a short mention or blurb in the community. It is not, however, the most effective way to reach your audience. Too many people change the station when the music stops, and the radio DJ's have to keep up a fast pace, so they don't have time to waste on one subject in particular.

Normally, it's easier to purchase radio space as an ad, rather than try to get a quick mention from the producer on your news. However, if it's an event that your company is sponsoring, it *is* a great idea to approach the station in an attempt to have them co-sponsor it.

If your company is having a fundraiser for the needy, and will have live bands and food, with family generated activities, many radio stations would love to be onsite, reporting directly from the event in an effort to interact with the community.

They gain from those situations, too, since their staff will be on hand mingling with the audience and giving away bumper stickers and t-shirts. You'll benefit because their listeners will know of your event prior to it happening, and many will attend just to be a part of the station's activities and giveaways.

The perfect medium is whatever your target audience enjoys most, and what they spend the most time on. If you're seeking to target affluent individuals who are community-conscious, then the newspaper is a great way to reach them.

If the blue-collar worker might generate a more pro-active approach in benefiting from your piece, then the radio is a perfect way to interact with that sector of the community. Everyone has different methods of communicating.

No matter what, investigate the possibility of distributing your news to as many different outlets as you can. The more people you reach, the higher the chances of success are for whatever event or product you're touting.

Bear in mind that not every producer or editor will see the significance in delivering your information to his or her audience. Therefore, before you present your items to them, develop it with that particular medium in mind.

Manipulating the Media – ***Channeling Your Document to Particular Personnel***

Imagine you're sitting at your editor's desk, wearing your editor's hat, dreading the trip through the onslaught of unsolicited materials, including press releases from all four corners of the world. Now, you know the competition is fierce for a spot in your publication, and you hate the thought of having to pick and choose.

Not hardly. A real editor has the ability to swiftly peruse his stack of incoming mail, rapidly discarding anything that doesn't fit the general criteria he looks for in a newsworthy item.

Eventually, the pile of crumpled papers surrounding the trash bin outnumbers the one on his desk, and he smiles with pleasure at the thought of being *almost* finished, nary a thought in his mind about the poor schmuck who worked day and night on his press release in the hopes that his idea would be printed in today's edition.

The editor is human, regardless of the rumors that say otherwise, and he appreciates hard work and dedication similar to the ethics he puts into his own work. Therefore, when he opens up your letter and sees it addressed to Joe Smith, the editor whose job he took eight months ago, he's not happy with you from the beginning.

His eyes will roll, and he may guffaw at the lack of research you've done in seeing who to address your press release to. But more importantly, he's going to attach a label of "sloppy" to your work, because he's wondering – "If this person can't even get *my name* right, which appears on the masthead of yesterday's edition, how can I trust that he's taken the time to verify his facts and source credentials?"

He can't. So off you fly, crumpled in a ball the size of a small apple, rebounding off the wall of his office, directly into the trash bin. And don't reserve any hope that your paper might *miss* the bin, and wind up on the floor, so that he might later rethink his hasty decision and revisit your work. It's not going to happen.

Newspapers are perhaps the easiest source to research when sending your press release in for publication. Open up the latest edition, and somewhere in a long, vertical stream, are the most prominent contacts you'll need when you fill out the envelope to send your news.

If, perchance, the masthead has been ripped from the rest of the paper, a simple phone call to the main number will result in a speedy delivery of the proper name and address to send your press release.

But before you hang up with the paper, get the correct spelling of your contact's name. And if it's Sam, Chris, Alex, or some other gender-neutral name, make sure you know if the person is male or female, in case your cover needs to be addressed to Mr. or Ms.

For a newspaper, you'll either be asked to send your press release to a department, in which case you won't have a specific person to target. Or, there will be one or more staff members assigned with the duty of receiving and processing your press release.

When you send in your item to the correct personnel, refrain from calling him to see if he got your letter, or whether or not he thinks they might use it in the next edition. If he works at a paper, chances are, he's busy all of the time, so your call will not endear you to him, but rather, make him intolerant of you. He'll be *more* impressed if you control your urge to contact him and harass him about your document.

Also, don't send in more than one version of your document to the publication. This means two things:

- 1) Don't rewrite a "better" version and mail several samples to the paper. And,
- 2) Don't send your submission in five different ways, by hand delivering it, emailing it, snail mailing it, faxing it, and calling it in. Pick one method of delivery and stay with it.

When you address your press release to specific personnel, it's important to check for the following:

- Is your letter addressed to the right contact?
- Is the contact name spelled correctly?
- Is the person's title right?
- Is the publication's name spelled correctly?
- Is the address up to date?
- Are you sending it in the right format – print, disk, or email, and does it appear to be professional, and not too flashy or distracting?
- Is your document spell checked and double-checked by your eyes for word selection?

When you look at the masthead of a publication, don't just pull a name from the top of the list and send your press release to the most important looking person. If you do this, you run the risk of either having your document thrown away immediately, or being sent to the lowest assistant on the staff for further review. That person likely won't have the experience you want to be handling your information.

Find out which person handles those items first. Be specific. Don't just address your letter to "Editor." There are probably several different editors at the publication, so this isn't enough of a distinction.

For example, a publication might have a features editor, health editor, entertainment editor, and associate editor who fields unsolicited submissions. Call the editorial department and ask the person who answers the phone "Which editor handles (x topic)?"

Make sure they know you're not out to speak to that editor, as they've been well trained to screen your call. Instead, let them know you only need it for submission purposes.

Have them spell out the name, no matter how simple it may sound. "Susie" can also be spelled "Suzi," while "Mellisa" can be spelled "Melissa." There are too many variations nowadays for you to take a chance that your preference is the right one. Spelling clarifies this, and keeps you from the fearful trash fate.

Make sure the publication's name and address is correct as well. These are always changing hands, so make sure the office you're sending your submission to is the one that handles your intended target publication. Some companies own more than one major publication, so make sure you specify which publication you want to reach before you send it.

Find out how they prefer to hear from you. Some publications require a printed copy of your work for consideration. Others, a quick email to the appropriate staff. And still others want it on a disk sent to their office for review. Make your document readily available in all formats, and send it in accordingly.

You wouldn't believe the quality of content editors receive in the pile of press releases sitting in their in-box every day. It's baffling to think that someone actually submits a press release without taking the time to run a quick spell-check on it before presenting it for publication.

Many spell checkers miss certain errors, though, so it's ultimately up to you to ensure the proper spelling, word selection, and verbiage are used throughout the piece. For instance, you might have typed:

*"The **reign** poured **of** the roof and into the flowerbed below."*

When you really meant to say:

*"The **rain** poured **off** the roof and into the flowerbed below."*

Some other common mistakes are "there" versus "their," and "for" versus "four." Always check your spelling and word choice before sending in your document.

In television, there isn't a readily available masthead for you to submit your piece, as there is in a newspaper or magazine. What you do, don't send in your press release to the broadcast journalist who actually sits behind the desk and reads the news.

He or she will not open your letter on the air and read your information to the public. They have a system you must go through, and if you make the cut, you can watch in amazement as he or she tells the public all about your news.

In this case, you'll have to phone the station to find out what the proper channels of submission are. You may be able to find out through their website, but a phone call will be more effective.

The Internet outlets will more than likely have an email contact for you to send your news. It may be a specific contact, or a general web master, depending on the site, but a quick search on the site should put you in the right direction.

Some websites, such as www.Internetnews.com, provide up to the minute information with an easy way of finding who to submit your news to. The page is set up so that you can tailor your news around the subjects you're interested in.

Want to know what's going on in the Business World? They have a link to it. International News? Click the link to find out more. And best of all, they have a staff page, brimming with links and titles of the most current members of their team, who are just waiting to hear from you.

Now, the links to each staff member's email don't specify who handles press releases, but it makes it very easy to contact an assistant and request the information. And if you don't hear back in a timely manner, then try contacting another person – just don't email them all at one time with a copy of your press release.

Remember, they probably work in the same vicinity, and if they compare notes, you might end up blacklisted from further consideration. This doesn't happen often, but if you become a pest, or are over-zealous about your work to the point that you're interfering with their work, you might find yourself the outcast of media contacts.

When you send in your press release to the proper personnel, always include a cover letter. Make your proposal brief and clear. Be sure to let the editor or other staff member know when the information is supposed to be used – normally, you should print “FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE” somewhere on the document itself so that they know it’s ready for print.

In your cover letter, quickly sketch out your reason for sending the document to the editor. Tell him why it’s new information, timely, and pertinent to his audience. If you have any statistics, keep them simple, but utilize them to your advantage.

When you write your press release, conclude it by typing “-30-” at the bottom of the document. This standard news protocol will show the editor that you are familiar with their procedures, and offer a bit of credibility to your submission.

The best thing to do when submitting your document for possible publication is to pick up the phone and make a quick call for verification. Yes, it might be a long-distance charge. But isn’t it worth it if it garners your clients a space in the next day’s edition?

Most people in the decision-making position have been exactly where you’re at now. They’ve had to do the legwork in order to find the right contacts, the right audience, and the right medium for their work. And having gone through those trials and tribulations, they aren’t willing to let you get off easy by ignoring the proper Journalistic etiquette.

Show them that you care about the subject matter you’re proposing by doing your homework and submitting it, not only to the right personnel, but in the right format as well. Your effort will not go un-rewarded, especially if you bear in mind all of the other submissions that will be emptied out with the trash at the end of the day for not following proper guidelines.

Once you establish yourself as a credible writer with your local media contacts, they’ll be readily available to you and will probably approach *you* for future information about any upcoming events having to do with your client.

Make sure they have your business card, and keep them updated frequently on upcoming news you think they might want to cover. If you happen to form an alliance with one media contact in

particular, offer exclusive coverage to that publication. This will be looked upon as very favorable in their eyes, as you've allowed them access to information no other competitor will have.

In the end, be persistent yet polite while dealing with your media contacts. Don't be put off if someone answers the phone in a grumpy mood. The news business is a very hectic profession, filled with deadlines and trying to outdo one another.

Be understanding and patient when dealing with your contacts, and offer them a friendly shoulder to deal with every chance you get. That way, when they answer the phone and find out it's you, they'll breath a sigh of relief and take the time to address your questions and concerns.

Noteworthy News – ***How to Keep Track of Your Submissions and Publications***

Congratulations! You've learned how to write, direct, and distribute your press release for maximum exposure in any medium you see fit. What comes next? Well, in order to see how effective your press release campaign has been, you have to monitor the market for your message.

Don't worry, you won't have to pull out your phone list and dial up every editor or staff member to whom you submitted the document. There are two simple ways for you to oversee your campaign without resorting to bothering your contacts. After all, you may need them again in the very near future, so you want to stay on friendly terms.

The first way you can keep tabs on your news is to do it yourself. Watch every program, pick up every edition of each publication, and listen to the radio at all times. Not very feasible?

Maybe if you only have one or two outlets, but if you distributed your press release to more than one media contact, and even worse, more than one *type* of media, you have a problem if you intend to try to monitor all of those avenues single-handedly.

Your client will be checking with you shortly after you distribute the release to see what the results have been. If you want to keep working for them, you'll need to show how effective you've been in garnering their company or organization a piece of the media pie.

If you do have the luxury of only monitoring one target, you'll still have to work hard to make sure you catch any mention of your work in their publication. It might be easy to monitor a written publication, but if you sent your release to a radio or television station, it's virtually impossible to listen 100% of the time.

Therefore, the best option you have in keeping track of your press release is to hire someone to do it for you. There are hundreds of services that do nothing but watch, listen, and read the media reports for any remote mention of your company or organization.

Yes, it costs money. But actually, it's a nominal fee when you compare the cost of tuning in 24 hours a day, or worse, losing your client because you couldn't prove how beneficial you've been in obtaining press space for their needs.

Some clipping services specialize in local area coverage. For instance, www.gnusman.com caters to those who want to monitor Santa Barbara subscription-based media publications. They provide their clients with a mailed or faxed clipping packet every Monday and Thursday that contains all of the clips within your target subject matter. Their subjects include:

- City and/or County Government News
- Environmental News
- Marine News
- Oil & Gas News
- Water News
- Court and Crime News
- Education News
- Local political races
- Custom

Many cities around the country have a personalized clipping service (or more) at their disposal. The subject headings may change, but the point is, you have access to local clips regarding your information.

What does something like this cost? Gнусman.com has a monthly fee that ranges from \$50 to \$85 per month. Not bad for complete coverage of the entire Santa Monica area, including Santa Barbara, Ventura and San Luis Obispo County newspapers.

But what if your news reaches beyond the scope of your local clipping service? Well, there are options for everyone. And they're all as close as your personal computer. Some of the most prominent clipping services are:

- www.newsdesk.com touts itself as "the premier news and information network for the hi tech, healthcare, entertainment and transport sectors - the communications bridge between the world's PR professionals and the journalists world-wide who they aim to influence."

The cost is not openly displayed on the site, as it says to contact the sales team. But usually, it will depend on the difficulty they'll have in tracking your message, and the subject matter and publications you're targeting.

- www.dowjones.com allows you to sign up and tailor your news to your specifications. Their counterpart, <http://bis.dowjones.com> integrates content from the top national papers, Dow Jones & Reuters newswires, business journals, market reports, and web sites. They charge an annual password fee, plus additional fees for viewing articles from the CustomClips service.
- www.newsedge.com caters to "Time-strapped CEOs who need mission critical intelligence to gain the competitive edge." They filter thousands of news stories daily for the most relevant documentation, and then deliver it to your desktop to keep you ahead of your competitors.

- www.businesswire.com offers non-journalists a chance to sign up for IndustryTrak, a fee-based service that includes a personalized Business Wire headlines and additional news sources. IndustryTrak is customized to show only the news releases that you need to see based on the profile you complete.

While the releases are segmented into seven industries on the public site, they are not further divided into the news category headings that you are able to select in your profile. IndustryTrak stores your news for 30 days.

- www.clippings.com provides a daily, email-based automated press clipping service. They select your clips based on key words you provide, including your company name, location, subject, etc.

Each day, you receive an email with links to each and every article, ranked in order of importance, regarding your specified keywords. The cost? A whopping \$6,000 for three months and up to five keywords. Want to try for one year? You're looking at \$20,000. For full access to the archives, it will cost you \$40,000.

- www.broadcastcommunication.com specializes in radio and television monitoring. They have a national database of associates, so they are able to cater to any market. What do they do? Radio and TV news clipping are provided via a clip of a broadcasted news segment.

Video clips are usually provided on VHS tape, but can also be delivered via more modern methods (.avi, .mpeg computer video formats). Radio clips are normally provided on audiocassette, but can also be delivered via more modern methods (.wav, .au computer sound formats).

The cost? They won't say. The site asks you to contact them for pricing information, because "Every client is different."

- www.bacons.com offers standard clipping services, which cater to the more traditional methods of monitoring your news, NetClips – Internet clipping with e-mail and web site

delivery, Electronic Clipping – Database retrieval delivered daily by e-mail, ExpressClips, which delivers an email every morning with clipping from the top dailies and magazines, and a Clip Analysis - Clip measurement reports on your standard clipping account coverage.

Almost every clipping service varies when it comes to their rates. No two sites are alike, but be forewarned that it will cost more to monitor major publications than it will to oversee your own backyard media.

Another important reason to use clipping services is because they provide you with any mention of your competitors. Having up-to-date information on your competition is paramount in any industry. You need to know if one of their products is about to be launched head-to-head against yours.

Clipping services provide a more thorough account of all of your media coverage than you could ever hope for. They keep a watch on newspapers, magazines, radio, television, Internet, Usenet, Trade Journals, and everything in between.

Paying for the privilege of having targeted news delivered to your in-box every morning, or several times a week, will pay off in the long run, because you'll reap the rewards immediately by seeing how effective your press release campaign was in garnering your client the attention and coverage they hired you to get them.

Another way you'll know if your campaign was successful is when the phone starts ringing off the hook. Reporters will be calling because they saw the information somewhere else, but now *they* want to do a story on your client or company.

It's a pleasure to form a working relationship with the media, once you master their methods of interaction and communication. It sometimes gets a bad rap, as editors and writers face off as opponents in the writing process.

But in reality, the two of you are working together to do one thing – get your message out. You have news that needs to be heard. The editor has an audience that wants to hear some news. Work together to make it happen.

You do your part by developing the idea, the story, and the meaty details of the content. The editor will do his part by spicing it up in a way the public is used to seeing – he'll throw in a splashing headline to turn heads in the audience.

The media is not a one-way production company. They rely on you and your clients to provide them with the very news that sells their papers, and pays their salaries. It's not that they're seeking to deny your submission.

They'd like nothing better than to have a stack piled to the ceiling of news they could run with without revisions. But that's not the case, and so they suffer burnout when it comes times to review the onslaught of unsolicited news sitting staring them in the eye.

Take pity on your editor and cater to his ego and his mindset. Empathize with him when he growls at you for not following his guidelines. Don't argue with him about the policies of the paper. He has no time to change policies in mid-stream, he's just concerned with making it by his two o'clock deadline later that afternoon.

Use the Golden Rule when dealing with the hurried news personnel on the other end of the phone. No matter how they treat you when you call to verify a contact name, inquire about the stylebook, or ask a question they've already been asked 2,000 times that day, treat them with respect and kindness, and they *will* appreciate it and return the favor.

Your most important weapon against lessening your chances of being published is knowing your target.

- Know the facts.
- Know the people.
- Know their audience.
- Know when to submit.
- Know what to say, and how to say it.
- Know when not to say anything.
- Know how to do it right, but know how to do it differently.
- Stand out, but be uniform at the same time.
- Know as much as you possibly can.

Never be intimidated by the prospect of developing and distributing a press release. The worst thing that can happen is you don't get published. If that's the case, try your news from another angle.

Revisit your publication target and learn even *more*. Talk to others who have made it, and find out what tactics they use in communicating with the same media contacts. Network your skills, your availability, and your know-how.

Develop a credible reputation with your media, and you'll have your foot in the door to one of the most powerful communication tools mankind has ever seen. Once there, maximize your message, and keep in tune with the audience and the editors.

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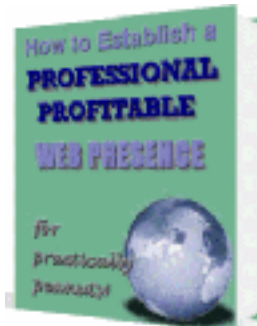
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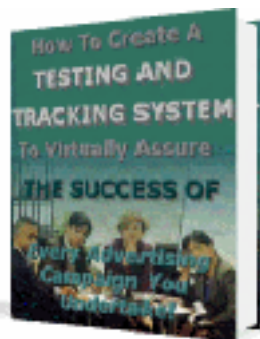
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