

HOW TO WRITE A PRESS RELEASE

I've seen so much bad advice on the net about how to write a press release. Not only can this waste a ton of time and money, it can also affect your standing with reporters. If you keep sending out lousy press releases, if you don't play the game according to their rules, you'll get a reputation as someone who doesn't know what they're doing. Reporters will avoid you in droves.

So, here's an outline on how to write a real killer press release. If you'd like to copy this web page and put it on your site, you are welcome to do so. Just read the details in the copyright notice section at the end of this article.

These are rules you should NEVER violate. I don't care what the other so-called publicity experts say - or those \$20 books on publicity you see in the bookstores and the libraries. These are rock-solid, never-violate rules.

- Press releases should be one page and one page only. If you can't tell your story in one page, you don't know what you're talking about. There is never a good reason to have a press release go on for more than one page
- Your release should be on 8 1/2 x 11" paper only. No odd sizes. No special shapes. No "original designs"
- The paper you write your press release on must be white no other color, tint, or shade
- You must use plain white paper - no letterhead, no printed borders, no photographs. Absolutely nothing, just plain white paper
- Never single-space the entire body copy. This is probably the #1 reason press releases are tossed out by reporters. It also screams to the reporter that you don't know how to play the game

Now let's look at what goes on this one page.

In the upper left corner, you're going to only have two options. You choose the one that's more appropriate for your purpose.

The first option you have is to put the words "For Immediate Release" in the upper left corner. You may have seen these words before, but you may not know exactly what purpose they serve. Actually, these words do two things for you and the reporter. First, these words tell the reporter that he can use your information anytime he wishes. He can use it today, tomorrow, next month, next year - whenever.

"For Immediate Release" does something even more important, though. When you put these words in the upper left corner, you're letting the reporter know that you know how to play the publicity game. The more of these clues you can put in your release, the more confidence the reporter will have in you. Keep in mind that some reporters get hundreds of press releases every day. They don't have time to waste on people who don't already know how to play the publicity game. So, these words are your first clue to the reporter that you are one of the people who knows how to play the game.

The only other option you have for the upper left corner is what I have termed a "time qualifier". A time qualifier tells the reporter exactly when - and when not - to use your release. Let's say you're putting together a release about Fathers Day. In the upper left corner, you would put "For Release On Or Before Fathers Day". Not only are you telling the reporter exactly when to use your release, you're again giving him a signal that you know how to play the publicity game. Not many press releases have time qualifiers. So, if you use one the right way, you just scored big points with the reporter.

Now let's look at the upper right corner of your release. Here you have only one option. You're going to put these exact words in the upper right corner of every release you ever write.

On the first line in the upper right corner you will put: "For further information contact:".

On the second line in the upper right corner, you're going to put the name and direct phone number of a real, live human being. You're not going to just put the name of a company, church group, organization, etc. If you do, you'll be screaming to the reporter that you probably don't know how to play the game. If you really knew how to play the game, you'd know to put a person's name, not a business name. So, on that second line, I would put "Paul Hart - (973) 509-5244".

Now let's look at the headline. The headline of a press release has one job and one job only. The only job of a press release headline is to force the reporter to keep reading. The headline has no other job. Don't force your press release headline to do anything more than force the reporter to keep reading. That's a big enough job!

Let's move on to the body copy of your release.

The body copy of a press release has three parts. In part one, you tell your whole story in just two or three sentences. If you can't tell your whole story in two or three sentences, you don't know what you're talking about. I can tell you the entire history of the Revolutionary War in two sentences.

- 1) We fought the British.
- 2) They lost.

That's the entire history of the Revolutionary War. All the rest is detail. If I can tell you the entire history of the Revolutionary War in two sentences, you can tell me your story in two sentences.

The second section of your press release should contain quotes from you and your credentials. Always quote yourself. Never quote anyone else. Why give someone else any attention in your release? It's your release. If they want some attention, let them get their own release!

The third section of your press release should contain your call to action. What do you want to happen as a result of your press release? That's what should go in section three.

All the time you are writing your release, you must write in what I call the "Who cares" style of writing. That means that after every sentence you write, you stop, read the sentence out loud and ask, "Who cares?" If you can't answer that question, it's a lousy sentence.

Let me give you a few examples of lousy headlines that don't pass the "Who cares?" test.

"Janice Jones Promoted To Vice-President Of Sales"

Who cares that Janice Jones was promoted to Vice-President of sales? No one cares. Not even Janice Jones. She didn't get a raise. She just got more work!

"Allied Manufacturing Announces 35% Increase In Sales"

Do you care that Allied Manufacturing had a 35% increase in sales? I doubt it. Who cares?

Get the idea? Be sure every sentence you write in your release can pass the "Who cares" test.