

Writing the Perfect Press Release

A press release is a written statement to the media. It can announce a range of news items, including scheduled events, personal promotions, awards, new products and services, sales accomplishments, etc. It can also be used to generate a feature story. Reporters are more likely to consider a story idea if they first receive a press release. It is a fundamental tool of PR work and getting media coverage.

Step 1: Genuine Headline

It should be brief, clear and to the point: an ultra-compact version of the press release's key point. Plenty of PR professionals recommend writing your headline at the end, after the rest of the release is written. The headline is known as the eye-catcher and is key to the press release being read.

- **Grabber.** News release headlines should have a "grabber" to attract journalists, just as a newspaper headline is meant to grab readers. It may describe the latest achievement of an organization, a recent newsworthy event, a new product or service.
- **Headlines written in bold!** A bold headline also typically uses a larger font size than the body copy. Conventional press release headlines use the present tense and exclude "a" and "the", as well as forms of the verb "to be" in certain contexts.
- **First word capitalized.** As are all proper nouns. Most headline words appear in lower-case letters, although using a stylized "small caps" font style can create a more graphically news-attractive look and feel. Do not capitalize every word.
- **Extract important keywords.** The simplest method to create the press release headline is to extract the most important keywords from your press release. From these keywords, try to frame a logical and attention-getting statement. If including a summary sentence after the headline, the same rules apply. Using keywords early will give you better visibility in search engines, and it will be simpler for journalists and readers to get the idea of the press release content.

Step 2: Body Copy

The press release should be written as you want it to appear in a news story. And remember this: most journalists are very busy, and don't have time to research your company's big announcement, so much of what you write for your press release will be what the journalists use in their writeup of your big event. Be sure to include key points you want mentioned.

- Start with the date and city in which the press release originates. The city may be omitted if it will be confusing — for example if the release is written in New York about events in the company's Wisconsin division.
- The lead, or first sentence, should grab the reader and say concisely what is happening. For example, if the headline is "ABC Biz finds a dance partner in XYZ Org," the first



sentence might be something like, "ABC Biz will hold a fundraising dance-off to benefit XYZ org on November 8 at the Orpheum Theater." It expands the headline enough to fill in some of the details, and brings the reader further into the story. The next one to two sentences should then expand upon the lead.

- The press release body copy should be compact. Avoid using very long sentences and paragraphs. Avoid repetition and overuse of fancy language and jargon. Strive for simplicity, and no wasted words.
- The first paragraph (two to three sentences) should sum up the press release, and the additional content must elaborate it. In a fast-paced world, neither journalists, nor other readers, would read the entire press release if the start of the article didn't generate interest.
- Deal with actual facts — events, products, services, people, targets, goals, plans, projects. Try to provide maximum use of concrete facts. This is *news*. A simple method for writing an effective press release is to make a list of following clarifications: Who, what, when, where, why, and how.

Step 3: "5 Ws" and the "H"

Who, what, when, where, why —and how— should tell the reader everything they need to know. Consider the checklist in context with the points below, using the example above to generate our press release:

- Who is this about? ABC Biz and XYZ Org
- What is the actual news? ABC Biz is holding a dance-off to benefit XYZ Org
- When does this even happen? November 8
- Where does this even take place? Orpheum Theater
- Why this is news? It's a fundraiser for a nonprofit organization
- How is this happening? A paid entry dance-off will be held to raise funds for XYZ Org
 - With the basics defined, fill in the gaps with information about the people, products, items, dates and other things related with the news.
 - If your company is not the main subject of the news, but is the source of the press release, make it clear in the body.
- Keep it short and to the point. If you are sending a hard copy, the text should be double-spaced.
- The more newsworthy you make the press release copy, the better the chances of it being selected by a journalist for reporting. Find out what "newsworthy" means to a given market and use this knowledge to hook the editor or reporter.

Step 4: Clear and Concise

Odds are whoever you sent your press release to has a dozen just like it in his/her inbox just waiting to be ignored. If you want yours to be chosen, it's got to be good. Not only does it have to be good, but it has to be as close to "ready for press" as possible.



- If your work is full of errors, lacking content, or just needs to be revised, they're not going to waste their time. Include good grammar, all of the basics, and have something to write about.
- Why should these people care what you have to say? If you're sending it to the right audience, it'll be obvious. If you're not, well, why are you wasting your time? Give the right people a piece of news (news, not advertising) and you're on the right track.
- They'll care more if you send it in the morning, say 7-8am. That gives them time to pad your piece into what they're already working on. Be considerate.

Step 5: Tie it together

Provide some extra information links that support your press release. Does the company you're selling have additional information online that readers may find useful? Great. Add it in.