

Successful press release writing.

In days gone by, editorial staff enjoyed making paper planes from badly written and poorly targeted press releases. Now, they have the power of the delete button. It's a tough world out there but getting your story published offers far more return than any paid-for promotion, so here are a few basic guidelines to putting a press release together.

Think

Before you start, define your purpose, message and audience. Have a clear understanding of who you're writing for, what you're trying to say and what you hope to achieve. Also, consider the publication you're writing it for and the style of language it uses – does it use flowing copy or prefer factual/statistical information. If you're targeting several different types of publication, speak the reader's language – write variations of the same release. What's great for the local paper won't get a look in a trade magazine.

Format

Format is all important, starting with a short, powerful headline (maximum 10 words) and a slightly longer sub-head which summarises the story. The first paragraph will either capture or lose the journalist, so try and make it interesting and topical without being long-winded.

The body copy should flesh out the story, expanding on the detail – USP's, features and benefits, who will use it etc. Any quotes from company representatives or a relevant third party need to be interesting and sound convincing and not like a sales pitch

End the release with a 'note to the editor' section which should contain a short company background, any contact details and useful reference links. Also, try and keep it to a single side of A4, where possible use 1.5 line spacing and always date your release.

Newsworthiness

Be objective about your release. Is it genuinely news or do you simply want to get your name in print? What might be exciting to you might not be to the editor and their readers. The information should be current, interesting and different or journalists will quickly learn to ignore any future releases you send.

Simplicity

However complex the subject may be, if the copy sounds confusing, it probably is. So find an easier way to say it, keeping your language simple and succinct. Where possible avoid excessive use of jargon, abbreviations, acronyms, clichés, buzzwords, hype and unnecessarily long words or fancy terminology.

Clarity

Be absolutely clear in what you're saying and don't leave any room for doubt or misunderstanding. Use short sentences and only concentrate on one aspect of the news in each sentence. And be specific – if you have facts and figures then don't be afraid to use them. If it's not relevant then leave it out.

Difference

In a crowded marketplace, difference is everything. So what makes your product or service different from your nearest competitors? Everybody claims to be better, cheaper, faster, bigger and smaller, so what really makes you stand out from the crowd. Sell the benefits!

Review

Review your copy several times. Check for consistency, spelling and grammar tighten it up, taking out any waffle and make sure it flows. Have you answered the six questions essential to every press release – who, what, why, where, when and how? If you've got time, leave it for a while and come back with a fresh eye.