



press release writing tips

Press releases are an ideal way of securing positive media coverage for your company. However, journalists receive hundreds of releases each week and only a select few make it on to the news pages; so getting the basics right is essential in order to ensure yours doesn't end up in the recycle bin.

By following a few simple rules you can dramatically increase the chance of your press release being featured. Tonic Public Relations has put together these top ten tips to help you produce well written copy that will catch the eye of busy editors and journalists:

Who is it aimed at?

Before you start writing, define your target audience. Who is your press release aimed at and what media do they read, watch or listen to? Ensure you do your research and the information you are sending is relevant – many editors say there is nothing more annoying than receiving copy that will be of no interest to their audience.

What's the story?

A good press release must be newsworthy so make sure you have an interesting story to tell. Try and identify what is new or unusual about what you've got to say or find a talking point that will be relevant to your audience. Remember: it's editorial, not advertising – the trick is to get a name check and promote your company's expertise without turning it into a blatant plug.

The angle of your press release can be changed to suit different audiences or media. In order to increase its relevance and maximise the chances of your release being used consider whether it can be tailored to each recipient's specific area of interest.

First impressions count

The introduction to your press release is crucial so take the time to get it right. Your copy may be edited so focus on the opening paragraph, which should contain the five w's – who what, when, where and why. As a general rule, the introduction should be around 50 words - keep it short and snappy and then use the rest of the press release to substantiate what you have said in the first paragraph.

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Making headlines

Remember, the headline is the first thing an editor sees. It is often your one and only chance to hook them and keep them reading. Make it clear, punchy, interesting and factual, giving a sense of the story. Resist the urge to be clever as it's unlikely your headline will be used in the publication.

Style tips

A well written release looks professional and saves editors from having to re-write copy. Research your target media and adopt the same writing style. Use simple language where possible and avoid using technical jargon your audience won't understand – it will usually be edited out.

Keep your press release concise – 200 to 250 words maximum and paragraphs of around 40 words. Before issuing to the press, check and double check your press release for any spelling, grammar or punctuation errors.

Using quotes

Quotes are not essential, but they can bring press releases to life when used effectively, adding personality, explanation or authority to your story. However, don't use them to repeat what you have already said in the press release – the main body of your text should be neutral in tone, and quotes offer a chance to really sell your product or service or express an opinion. They should sound like speech so avoid using superfluous language.

Essential information

Clearly mark the document as a 'Press Release' and write 'Ends' after the main copy to signify the completion of the press release. It's also a good idea to include a word count at the foot of the copy to allow the journalist to see at a glance how much space the story will fill.

You should always include your contact details at the foot of a press release, including name, telephone number and e-mail address. Ensure the relevant people are on hand to take any calls once your press release has been issued.

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Note to editors

Stick to the key points in the main body of your news release – if you do need to include any additional background or technical information attach an extra sheet headed 'Note to editors' or 'Background information'.

Issuing the release

Research the deadlines of your target publications as some magazines work months in advance. Also, make sure you send your press release to the appropriate contact – if a business press release lands on the sports desk it is likely to be binned and vice versa.

E-mail is the norm when issuing press releases but avoid large attachments, which can cause delivery problems. Where possible, paste your copy and image into the body of the e-mail.

For more information about PR and how it can help your business, please contact Tonic Public Relations on 01527 834648. Tonic Public Relations' 'Tonic on Tap' service is dedicated to providing PR for SMEs. For more information see www.tonicontap.co.uk.