

# Catching Eyes with the Perfect Press Release

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We've all heard it before: **knowledge is power**. With a current political climate that has waged war on the dissemination of information and media in general, supplying knowledge to the public is perhaps more important than ever. The simple press release serves a major role in the spread of information to communities across the world, connecting news sources to media outlets— and therefore the public as a whole. Remember that. Especially when you find yourself on your fourth cup of coffee, stuck on how exactly to phrase that *one* sentence. Press releases serve an important role.

So, what even is a press release? It's ok— you can ask. Maybe you lied a little in your interview. No judgment. A press release is a concise, to-the-point report that publicists write and send out to journalists as a suggestion for media coverage. Press release topics can range from local events to major corporate announcements to scientific discoveries. Some companies will have internal publicity departments, while some individuals/organizations will hire outside PR firms to handle their publicity matters. Either way, press releases serve as a way to provide journalists with information, which they will hopefully spread to the public at large.

Here's the thing, though. The system isn't perfect. Modern day journalists, especially those at the big publications, get hit with hundreds of press releases and countless follow-up calls from publicists a day. This gives publicists a bit of a bad rap for being annoying. But what's a publicist to do? You're caught between a rock and a hard place: you need to grab their attention and you need to stay in their good graces. Here's the key: write an eye-catching, perfect press release.

### Basics

A press release, at its core, should always answer (and answer them fast!) these classic questions:

- What?
- Who?
- When?
- Where?
- Why... is this a good piece of news? Why... is this important?

Think of a press release as your chance to fill-in the journalist on what's going on as fast as possible. Like you just caught them as the elevator door is closing between you two. This isn't the time to beat around the bush. Give them the fast facts and know that, if they're interested, they will reach out with questions and you can give them all the little details you want.

You can mess around with the formatting a little— make it your own. Some stories may look best on the most professional, black-and-white format you can think of, while some can really stand out with bright colors or logos. Just think it through before you do anything too crazy. Eyes begin to read your message before they even get to the words on the page.

Here's what I *will* insist on: every press release should have the basic formatting of (1) headline (2) opener (3) body (4) boilerplate and (5) contact information.

Headline: Your title. The initial eye-catcher. Make it snappy, make it make sense. Ideally, you want to hit that perfect combo of answering *why is this interesting?* and *what are you even talking about?*

Which one do you like more?

“Cow from Charlottesville wins first-prize in Virginia State Fair”

“Local Cow Dazzles State-Fair, winning blue ribbon with strawberry milk and tap dancing ”

Opener: Remember— that elevator door is closing fast. It's a win to have a journalist even click on your press release, but remember that they can close out of the document at any point. Try to summarize the gist here— as fast and as dynamically as possible! You want a reader to be able to walk away with your message, even if they just read the opener. This section should be a few sentences in length.

Body: This section is going to be read by those who are most interested in what you have to say. Use this to your advantage, but don't take it too far. The body should give the reader more information regarding your announcement, but still only the biggest, most interesting points. You can save the cow's favorite childhood memories for when you're on the phone with the journalist. This should be only another paragraph or two— depending on how much information you have to give.

Boilerplate: Weird word, I know. Depending on who you're writing for, you may already have this written-up for you. A boilerplate is a little general info paragraph at the end of a press release about the company/client you are writing about. These are usually consistent between different press releases, no matter the subject.

Contact information: Don't forget this part! Be sure to clearly and accurately state your (or the press contact's) information so that journalists can easily get in touch about the topic.

## **Make it Eye-Catching**

So, it's not your fault if you get stuck with... not the most exciting pitch in the world. We can't all be covering Khloe and Tristan's baby drama. But what you *can* control is how intriguing you make your press release... even if it *is* about the Virginia State Fair's Annual Cow Contest.

So... what makes your story interesting? You may have to do a little bit of brainstorming. That's ok. For some stories, you'll be able to find a certain angle that *is* actually interesting. Maybe the new CEO of the company is a first generation American. Or the event you're selling is being run by a C-list celebrity. That's perfect— use the angle that will get journalists to even take a look at your press release.

You want to think of what will catch a journalist's eye. Their job is to tell interesting stories and to engage their audience. Your grandmother going to the grocery store and being checked out in a timely manner doesn't make the news. That's because there's nothing out of the ordinary. As nice as that is, ordinary doesn't sell. People read articles and listen to the news to learn about something they don't already know or experience something they haven't already experienced. Keep this in mind when crafting your press release.

If you're struggling with an angle, remember this: there are niche audiences and publications for nearly everything under the sun. Rather than trying to find an angle that the whole world is going to find interesting, try and think of an angle that could appeal to a certain community, like the corporate world or recreational runners. Thinking of the specific community's interests, rather than trying to appeal to the mass-market, can help you figure out where the sparkle of your story lies. This leads me to my next point...

## **Find the Right Audience**

Here's the thing about press releases— and I hesitate to tell you this halfway deep into an article about how important it is to write them well. And it is, believe me! However, half of the battle is in making sure you are targeting the right audience. You don't want all of your hard work to fall into all of the wrong inboxes. You could write the *Hamlet* of press releases, but if you are sending your masterpiece to all of the wrong places, you're not going to get the results and calls back that you want. An equal amount of preparation and thought should go into your targeted journalists.

Do your research and find outlets that typically write about your topic. Believe me, there's an outlet for everything... even *that*. Take note of their style, their subject areas, their journalists. That's your start.

Then, dig a little deeper and find journalists who have written about your topic before or have expressed interest in your topic. This can be your foot in the door for more general outlets. Major outlets often have hundreds of journalists— 99 of them may

have no interest in prize-winning cows, but 1 of them may be their “state fair” reporter. You never know.

### **Just One More Thing...**

Don't be the one to get caught with a sloppy little typo in the middle of your press release you slaved over. I know, *obvious*, but so obvious that it deserves being said. A typo, a grammatical error, a misspelled word can majorly hurt the overall impression and impact of your release. Don't let it happen. Read over your writing, have friends read over your writing, get a grammar tutor— I don't care. Your press release should be, if nothing else, perfectly polished.

### **Wrapping It Up**

Press releases can be tedious. It's easy to get caught up in the details, stressed about the little things. Remember that with each press release you send out into the world, you are working towards improvement. PR can be a tiresome job, but it can also be incredibly rewarding. Remember why you entered this field in the first place and remember the importance that information plays in our world. You've got this!