

WRITING and USING A PRESS RELEASE

Don't let a limited marketing budget keep you from getting your project in front of the right people via the media. An effective public relations campaign does not have to cost a lot of money. And the press release is probably the most inexpensive form of publicity. However, if an editor doesn't pick up your release, you are most definitely getting what you paid for - nothing. A successful press release will have the following key elements:

1. **Strategic Placement** – Make sure it is targeted to the right media
2. **Relevant Content** – It must offer NEWS that the media considers important to its audience
3. **Proper Structure** – You must adhere to professional standards in terms of form and structure (hint: the shorter the release, the better; it should be free of flowery language, over-hype, etc.)

It cannot be overstated that your press release must convey some form of real news, not an ego stroke, or a nice item of relevance only to you, your company or immediate circle. It must pass the – “would the average consumer care about this” test. It is not an essay where you can wax poetic, it is a news story that reviews the facts...and nothing but the facts.

Based on your research, you should know which publications/ outlets are most likely to find your story of interest, and the more you know about a publication the better. You should become a student of the media; know the differences between outlets, including their audiences and deadlines (the cut-off time for publications before they go to print for the next issue):

(For Example)

Daily Newspapers (deadlines are everyday, generally at the end of the work day)

Weekly Newspapers (deadlines are the day before publication)

Monthly Magazines (deadlines could be 2-3 months ahead of street date)

Weekly Magazines (deadlines are the day before publication)

On-line services (deadlines vary – do the research)

Let's assume your press release has reached the right person. After the editor picks up your piece, you have about 10 seconds to grab his/her attention and make him/her care about your story. An editor acts as a screener of material for their “clients” – the readers or audience. He knows what they want and if he wants to keep them as clients, he has to give it to them. That keeps everybody – the reader, the publisher and the advertisers – happy.

So, you have to think like a newsperson and make the content relevant; and make the relevance obvious. In short, make the editor want to read on and, through that, share your news with his/her audience.

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Obviously, if your press release does not go to the proper outlets, or convey relevant content, then the structure will matter little. However, let's assume you hit the mark on those points. How do you structure the information? Following are a few tips that are underscored by an actual press release the OneDiaspora Group prepared for a client, each of the following tips are illustrated on the sample.

1. Press Release should be on your letterhead.
2. Contact information (name, phone number, email address) should appear at the top of the release (you should also repeat it at the end of the release).
3. It should be stated at the top that it's a press release and the release date.
4. The headline is your chance to catch the editor's interest. It is the angle of your story. Make it eye grabbing; the use of a sub-headline can also be effective, though not necessary. **The headline should be in bold type.**
5. The dateline includes the location and date of the press release; **this should be in bold as well.**
6. The first sentence of the of the first paragraph is called the "lead." It tells what the release is about; this sentence and the remainder of the first paragraph should answer as many WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, and HOW questions as possible.
7. Middle paragraphs should continue to answer the key questions (if necessary) as well as offer quotes from authorities/key parties (usually you or who you are representing) explaining why the news is important to the readers/audience. Middle paragraphs also summarize and further detail the facts, issues, persons discussed in the release, etc.
8. The final paragraph should always be the "boilerplate," a concise statement about your firm's/group's services and mission (very important in promoting yourself; you should draft a standard paragraph that can be used over and over again).
9. Repeat contact information – very important if the publication runs your release in its entirety – which many small outlets do.
10. End each release with # # # in the middle of the page.

Here's a helpful hint...press releases and news stories read very much alike. Start paying closer attention to how the articles in your favorite newspapers are written; check out the leads, how information is introduced, and the transition from one paragraph to another, etc.

(See ODG Sample Press Release 1)

