

# Creating Press Releases that Work

## Why bother?

**Free news articles in a newspaper or on local radio are the most cost-effective marketing tool there is and it's really the only part of a marketing strategy that builds credibility. When an organisation is new it is vital that it builds awareness and credibility quickly, and publicity is a key.**

Paid for advertising controls the message ("you get what you pay for") while a news article does not, and

because of this, the article creates credibility.

Many times readers see an advert and they know that what they are reading is just overblown hype. Most readers are more likely to trust independent authorities such as reviewers, columnists, reporters or broadcasters. Without a doubt, it is these same authorities that are directly influenced by good public relations and specifically, a well-written press release.

## The editor's perspective

**The job of an editor is to sort the wheat from the chaff and then print the chaff. That's what it often seems like, anyway. In truth, an editor prints what he thinks the purchasers of his publication want to read.**

Therefore every press release must, at one and the same time, satisfy two completely different criteria. The first is to discharge the editor's duty to his readers and legitimate advertisers, while the second is to fulfil the organisation's desire for free publicity.

The press or news release which can do this will find widespread acceptance. Most editors will accept material from any source, but only so long as:

- The style and standard of writing lives up to, or reaches down to the target audience

- The content tells the target market something of real interest
- The material stands on its own two feet and requires nothing more than a cursory edit to make it fit the space available



Next, the message. Which sounds better: "Blogg's open New Store In Glossop" or "New Glossop store provides 100 jobs". Of course, it is the second. Presenting your endeavours in terms of the social, environmental, employment, educational will get you better results.

Common sense is the greatest aid to press release publication, by making it as easy as possible for the sub-editor to use your item. So, how do we make it easy?

## Make life easier for your editorial allies

Present yourself as the kind of person editors want to deal with. In any oral or written communication with a media outlet, you should be friendly and approachable, articulate and concise. Be willing to answer reporters' questions, even if you have to research the answers and get back to them. (Don't be afraid to say you don't know but can find out, and never give an answer you're not sure is accurate.) If you're running an event, let the press in for free to cover it. Finally, know the deadlines and publication schedules of the media you deal with, and understand their importance.

A deadline is the day and time a reporter has to get a story in if it's going to be printed or broadcast in the next edition. Except for very hot last-minute news, those deadlines may as well be written in stone. Get your stuff in on time and don't try to wheedle a journalist into bending a deadline for you-the bad reputation you will get among the press is far worse than being left out once. And don't forget that a reporter needs some time to work with your material, and is balancing your story against many others.

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Typically, morning daily newspapers close the edition around 10 p.m., afternoon papers at around 11 a.m., weeklies two to four days before publication. Give daily and broadcast journalists a minimum of a couple of hours before their deadline to write their story-

several days if you're dealing with weeklies, and even longer for monthlies-and don't call any reporter or editor right at deadline, when s/he's frantically trying to get all the stories out.

## Writing the news release

- Make sure the information is newsworthy.
- Tell the audience that the information is intended for them and why they should continue to read it.
- Start with a brief description of the news, then distinguish who announced it, and not the other way around.
- Ask yourself, "How are people going to relate to this and will they be able to connect?"
- Make sure the first 10 words of your release are effective, as they are the most important.
- Avoid excessive use of adjectives and fancy language.
- Deal with the facts.

**The Headline:** In about ten words -- or less -- you need to grab the attention of the editor. The headline should summarize the information in the press release, but in a way that is exciting and dynamic; think of it as a billboard along a highway -- you have just a few words to make your release stand out among the many others editors receive on any given day.

**Opening Paragraph:** Sometimes called a summary lead, your first paragraph is critical. This paragraph must explain "the five Ws and one H" of the story -- the who, what, when, where, why, and how. This paragraph must summarize the press release, with the following paragraphs providing the detail. The opening paragraph must also contain the hook: the *one* thing that gets your audience interested in reading more -- but remember that the hook has to be relevant to your audience as well as to the news media. A hook is not a hard sell or a devious promotion -- it's just a factual statement.

**The Body:** Using a strategy called the *inverted pyramid*, the body of the press release should be written with the most important information and quotes first. This inverted pyramid technique is used so that if editors need to cut the story to fit space constraints, they can cut from the end without losing critical information.

**The Closing Paragraph:** Repeat the critical contact information, including the name of the person, their phone number and/or email address.

## Top tips for a story

Think about the work your group is currently doing -- you may find a good news story there. Otherwise, you may need to be more creative:

- Write a letter to the letters page, commenting on a story/letter
- Publish a survey or report
- Hold a special meeting
- Call for a public enquiry
- Mark an anniversary
- 100<sup>th</sup>, 500<sup>th</sup>, 1000<sup>th</sup> member
- Start new project
- Make or receive a reward
- Present a petition
- Launch plans for year ahead
- First or last...

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## The physical format

Separate the sections clearly to make sure that the recipient can access the information that they need effectively. Use something similar to below and stick to a format:

Head the page NEWS RELEASE

---BEGINS---

Let the journalist know where they should start.

---ENDS---

Let the journalist know where the release finishes.

---NOTES FOR EDITORS---

Extra information about the topic, company, etc., e.g. summary of the companies activities, how long they have been established.

---CONTACT---

Name, title, address, phone number, fax, e-mail and websites address if the journalist needs more information or more quotes.

## Using photographs

Pictures paint a thousand words, and newspaper editors love photographs. If it is a specific event, launch etc, try to invite the newspaper to send a photographer. However, this isn't always possible, so if one cannot attend try and send a relevant, eye-catching picture with your news release. Try and

include people in the photograph and do a close up, not from a long way away. Most newspapers can now deal with black and white or colour prints, and increasingly accept photographs electronically. However, the golden rule is to check first. If you send a photograph, don't forget a caption on the back.

## Who to send your news release to

"People sell to people". It is therefore vital to build up a list of contacts with your local media organisations – and you will be surprised how many of them there are. Find out their specific deadlines and requirements

– for example, can they accept releases by email? Select the recipients of the release with care.

## Finally

News is anything that other people are interested in. And being newsworthy consists of letting editors and reporters know you're doing something of interest to other people—having an event; telling a story; creating or participating in any occurrence; supporting, opposing, or even merely observing a trend or activity. Editors and producers have the tremendous challenge of coming up with new stories to fill their pages and air slots—day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year. It isn't always easy to fill all that space.

Therefore, you become their ally. Your achievements—along with your ability to publicise them properly and work co-operatively with media people—will cause local editors to welcome you with open arms. Not only will you have a very good shot at getting your press release printed (perhaps several times in different sections of the paper), but a reporter might even arrange a more in-depth story. And that is pure gold for you!

This fact sheet is one of a series of fact sheets produced by High Peak CVS. **They can all be downloaded from our website [www.highpeakcvs.org.uk/how](http://www.highpeakcvs.org.uk/how)**

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*training and with legal issues. We have resources, including a meeting room, computers and OHP for use by groups.*

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