

## How to Write the Perfect Press Release

Journalists are bombarded with hundreds of pitches in their inboxes every single day, not to mention the rampant follow-ups from people asking if their last email was received. Precious time is wasted reading mediocre, overly promotional, or flat out irrelevant content.

If you want to stand out and break through this noise as a PR professional, there are some key things to remember.

- Format: What you need to know before and during the process of putting the press release together
- Pitch: How to improve your aim when pitching to the media
- Follow up: Perfecting the dreaded follow-up

Let's examine them one by one:

### **Formatting your press release**

- Avoid using PDFs — they may look neat and tidy, but it makes copying and pasting text much more difficult. The most pleasing format is a clean Word Document. You can't go wrong with pasting the content of the press release into the body of the email too — sometimes the attachment is faulty and its best to have all your bases covered.
- Include contact details of the brand for the potential customer who will be reading the press release, and your own contact details in case the media want to contact you for more information.

- When it comes to length, do some research into who you're pitching and what they prefer when it comes to the length of press releases, as this may differ. Leigh advises that at BizCommunity, 500-word press releases and 1 000-word opinion pieces suit them best.
- There is no need to squeeze the company's name into every line of every paragraph. Leave out adjectives like "best," "world's leading" and "most advanced" if you don't have the sources to back up those statements.
- Provide the correct links to research and resources that you've used to get to any conclusion.
- With regards to style, it again depends on where in the world and to whom you're sending your press release. For example, at BizCommunity, they use British English, not American, and their style guides are mostly based on Oxford and Guardian style guides.
- If you're a "wordy wonder," remember that media houses do edit for clarity and conciseness when it comes to earned editorial. If your boss or client wants it published word-for-word, it might be better to have it published through a paid-for media office.
- To minimize too many back-and-forth emails, check that you've included all the details necessary in the release and that you've actually attached what's necessary. More specifically; names and addresses, dates and times, all pricing information, social media handles and the relevant hashtags.
- Include at least one image, as an attachment, in your email. Don't embed it in your Word Doc or, worse, in your PDF. Make sure the image you use is

licensed for republishing or that you own the rights, and include the designer or photographer's name and details.

- Proofread: take one final read through and ensure you've included everything and taken out "[Confirm X]" or similar placeholders. Do a spell-check for typos, get a colleague to read it as well. A second set of eyes will often catch errors you've missed. Ensure you have the client's approval before you hit send.

Top Tip: Use embargos. Embargoed press releases are shared with the intention of only being published at a later, specified date. Although a great way to organize work in advance, embargoes are often referred to as the weapon of mass destruction — a disaster if things go wrong.

If you're sending an embargoed release, be sure to have the date and time of release clearly specified. Remember to take into account different time zones if you're sending news globally, as this can have major ramifications if done incorrectly.

#### **Pitching to the media**

Once your press release has been written, checked, double-checked, and approved, you're ready to pitch it to the media. There are seven steps to success you need to be aware of. They may sound simple, but they're often overlooked:

- You need a professional-sounding email address. Even if you're a freelancer or solo agent using Gmail as your host, make sure the first part of your email address is your name or company name — you have less

chance of being automatically sent to spam, and it just sounds more professional.

- A stand-out subject line is not, “BREAKING NEWS” in capitals, as journalists get hundreds of those. It’s also not “Press Release”, as that doesn’t make anyone want to click. Use a stand-out feature or data point from your story as it will grab attention and make it easier for the publisher to follow up.
- Individualize your greeting but don’t go crazy — ideally you want to find out the name of the person you’re emailing. If you don’t know the name a simple “Hello,” or “Good morning,” will do. Avoid using gendered salutations such as “Dear Sir”.
- Start with a sentence on why this news is important, to avoid having your mail sent to the “evergreen inbox” for a slow news day.
- Including a CTA is crucial: ask the receiver if they’re interested in publishing the news or if there’s any more information they need that is not included in the release.
- Keep it short: this is the hundredth email your receiver is opening today.
- Lastly, include your own details: name, company, email address and phone number.

#### Top Tip: Formalities

- Don’t call to say you’re going to email and don’t email asking if you can send the release — this type of formality is outdated today. Just send the release.

- Don't lay out the press release with embedded links and logos, text boxes and images. The editors will just have to remove and redo it all themselves anyway, which adds more time to the editing and uploading process.
- The worst is to promise exclusivity when your well-meaning colleague has already pitched the same release to another editor or worse, a different publisher.

### **Master the follow up**

The art of the follow-up is difficult to get right. It takes a lot of practice and trial and error, but it's a crucial part of the process.

Here are a few quick tips:

- Don't follow up as soon as you've hit send. If you haven't received a response within 24 hours, one follow-up call or email should be sufficient. (Unless it really is urgent, timely, or "breaking news").
- Be careful about calling after office hours. Editors are likely juggling just as much trying to maintain a work-life balance as you are. Of course, emergencies can sometimes happen. If they do, highlight the exact part of the press release you need to be changed or omitted, and send it through as soon as possible.