

The power of the press release



Most journalists find press releases unhelpful.

But why?

Let's face it -- the perception of the value and utility of a press release, over time, has diminished. Press releases, which still often contain news value, have too often given way to brands flooding the inboxes of journalists with releases that are less and less newsworthy and increasingly promotional. From print to digital news formats, a 24/7 news cycle and the rise and ubiquity of social media, press releases still play a pivotal role to help brands distribute news, at scale. But the news media landscape is vastly different. Editorial teams are cutting back. Resources continue to diminish. And the pressure for clicks, website traffic, and eyeballs necessitate a smarter, more streamlined approach.

While there have been seismic changes for journalists and PR professionals, there's also common ground, which is why the relationship, when it works best, is symbiotic and continues to endure, more than a half century later. Central to that relationship is providing journalists with the news fundamental to telling smart, engaging and informative stories. And really, one of the best ways to achieve this is to design a press release that delivers the requisite information for which journalists are seeking.

So where are PR Pros falling short? More than two-thirds of journalists don't feel that press releases have the appropriate news content or value for their beats. In fact, 52% feel the content is too marketing or sales oriented. And 48% believe press releases lack an element of news or timeliness. To tailor your content more appropriately, read on for some helpful and insightful tips that collected straight from the source.



Say it upfront -- without jargon

In ranking the most important elements of a press release, the headline is the clear preference, followed by the opening paragraph. An overwhelming 94% of PR pros and 91% of journalists agree that the headline is crucial in capturing attention. They want releases that convey the story in the up-front -- reinforcing the what and why, followed by supporting context and information throughout the article. This is not surprising given the time constraints on journalists and their need to immediately understand what the news is and why it matters.



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Journalists seek a “catchy but informative headline that’s not exaggerating.” Avoid hyperbolic statements and verbiage, such as “the best, the greatest and the smartest.” Both parties also agree that the introductory paragraph is the second most critical element. If you haven’t caught a journalist’s attention in the first paragraph, the likelihood of them continuing to read the rest of the release is slim to none.

Surprisingly, data isn’t as impactful with journalists as comms pros think. This could be because data is oftentimes buried at the bottom and should be more prominently featured in the headline and/or intro paragraph. If the data is crucial to conveying the storyline, it should be included in the beginning and clearly contextualized.

Use relevance to capture attention

It takes more than a well-written release to get the story published. Journalists are seeking relevance, personalization and quality research. “The best pitches and press releases are customized. They present themselves as relevant and provide enough information to really envision the story,” said Dwight Silverman, technology editor at the Houston Chronicle. Check on what they’ve written about recently - for example, if their beat has changed due to the election, your pitch and release won’t be helpful if it doesn’t touch on this topic. Even if it’s a contact you’ve worked with many times, make sure you research what they’re currently writing about regularly.

While press releases can be a helpful conduit for PR pros to share their news with the media, it’s important to have the knowledge of what journalists find helpful prior to pitching or writing one, which include:

- ✓ Cut straight to the chase in the headline or first paragraph of the release
- ✓ Don’t use data for the sake of using data - make sure it properly fits into the larger story
- ✓ Research what your target journalist is currently writing about before sending something that could be irrelevant

At a time when both PR pros and the media are under more pressure than ever, writing press releases that are relevant, align with trending news topics, and succinctly capture an overarching message increase chances of success. Irrespective of structural and technology forces continuing to shape the news media environment, if you’re able to think like a journalist when you put pen to paper, you’re more likely to produce a valuable release.



News Direct has purpose-built a news and content distribution platform to meet the varied demands of modern media outreach -- including the unique capability to distribute engaging videos, infographics and images as standalone content.