



Marketing PowerBoost

The Publicity Staple - Press Releases

By Susan Baka

Could your business use a marketing powerboost? This article focuses on the most basic, yet most often poorly executed, media relations tool – the press release.

Journalists receive an astonishing amount of unsolicited information daily – news releases, press kits, wire stories, alerts, invitations...arriving via e-mail, courier, fax...not to mention the follow-up phone call. If not done well, your press release won't get more than a cursory glance. But, if you don't have the budget to compete with an expensive fancy kit, is it even worth the effort?

Yes. Reporters are, by nature, people who respond to words and they're looking for a story. And a press release that captures their attention can go a long way in generating you publicity. Not only will you get a cost-effective and credible message out to potential customers, but you gain an all-important media contact.

Here are the basics I incorporate when crafting new releases for my clients:

1. **Make it newsworthy.** Showering media with fluffy or self-serving press releases about unimportant topics will cause busy reporters to tune you out. It's better to wait until you have a story to tell - eg. a news release extolling the virtues of your existing product or service is not news, but if you are introducing something new that will benefit readers – it is.
2. **Format it correctly.** This may seem small, but it's a big thing. If your release doesn't look professional, it will not get read. Include, in this order: release date, contact info, headline, contents of the actual release, starting the first paragraph with the location of the story followed by a dash, and, at the end, a brief paragraph about your company in general. End the release with “-30-” centred on the page, which signifies the end.
3. **It's all in the lead.** The headline and first paragraph must capture the reporter's attention. Hard news style is to answer the Five Ws – who, what, when, where and why – in the first paragraph, but for “soft” stories like a new product or service announcement, consider opening with a provocative question or interesting statistic or fact that relates to your topic.
4. **Write in inverted pyramid style.** This means starting with the general “just the facts, ma'am” information, and then moving into the details. Also include a quote from a company principal or, more powerfully, a testimonial from a customer. Pick up any newspaper, or listen to any news broadcast, and you'll see this style used for most of the stories.
5. **Target and tailor.** Consider all the media outlets that may be interested in your story, including community papers and trade publications in your field. Then, alter your press release depending on the audience, eg. focus on the local angle for a community paper and on product/service benefits for readers of a trade journal. Send it out and don't hesitate to follow-up with a phone call.



It's worth your while to send press releases even if results aren't immediate, since reporters may file good ones for future reference. And, if you're new to the world of media relations, consider hiring a professional to help you navigate through it and write press releases with impact.

Information specialist and marketing expert Susan Baka, President of Bay Communications & Marketing Inc., has been providing innovative marketing communication strategies and vehicles for clients since 1991. Visit www.baycomm.ca to get free sure-fire tips on how to boost your marketing.

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