

# Ten top tips for writing an effective press release

by **Beth Whittaker** of **Viva Communications**.

Raise your profile with clear, concise and affordable PR: saying the right things to the right people, at the right time.

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**News is people. It is people talking and people doing.**  
**Always tell the story through people** - Harold Evans

**1: Know your target media – research a target media list, with names, email addresses and phone numbers.** If you're not sure who to contact, call the paper/magazine/radio/TV station. Think about why your story would interest that particular paper, website etc. Don't 'spam' all the media at once.

**2: What's your angle?** It has to be NEWS! It has to make the journalist say: 'that's a good story' and be able to knock another article 'off the page'.

New people, products, services, orders, celebrations, unusual client requests fulfilled... something which would make a great photo, video or sound.

What about your professional 'take' on a national issue? Promote your expertise and knowledge – but be quick on the draw – respond on the same day. Build a reputation as an expert that the media can approach for strong, 'soundbite' quotes in future.

**3: Start the release with a short catchy title** giving a sense of the 'angle' of the story in a few words. Don't get bogged down in trying to write the perfect headline. Get all the important information into as few words as possible, using the **'5 Ws' checklist** (right).

Keep it short (maximum ten paragraphs), include some great **'sound bite' quotes** from you (and from clients or customers if appropriate). Be enthusiastic about what you to say but not gushy...

**News is just what it says on the tin.** It's something **new, interesting, attention grabbing! Would YOU want to read your press release? Will a journalist?**

Send the press release in the body of the email, with photos as hi-res jpeg attachments (all photos must be captioned). It's very unlikely the media

will use your company logo, so just sent plain text.

## The 5 Ws checklist

Make sure you include the following information in as few paragraphs as possible:

- 1. Who** – who is the focus of the article – could be you, or a product, or your customers or clients, or a local or national issue
- 2. What** – what is new, different, first, biggest... *news is not 'everyday'*
- 3. Where** – where are you based (local media especially are interested in this) & how many do you employ (if applicable)
- 4. When** – if a launch or opening, be clear about dates and times. Be aware of media deadlines – eg a monthly magazine copy deadline can be up to two months before publication
- 5. Why** – why did you set up your business, why are you launching a new product/service, why are you moving to new premises, why are you hiring new staff...

**4: Use 'human interest'** - stories about **people** are more interesting. Use examples of the difference your product or service is making to customers or clients. Include quotes from them (with their permission).

Think about what the eventual reader/listener/viewer or your press release will want to know – what will make them visit your website or contact you?

**5: Write it right!** Unless writing a quote, write the body of the release in the third person: *Bloggs Ltd is Gloucestershire's leading supplier of plugs not: We are Gloucestershire's leading supplier of plugs.* Include powerful **first-person quotes** to help tell the story. Put your passion into your quotes.

**Don't be whimsical!** Check out the media you

are hoping to get coverage in. Most journalists just want straight information, no exclamation marks, no little jokes!

Unless you are targeting a professional or trade publication, it's unlikely the journalist will be an expert in your field – so assume you need to explain.

**Avoid using acronyms or jargon**, and if you cannot avoid an acronym, ensure you spell it out in full the first time you use it.

**Be subtle.** Although it's essential to promote your business name, keep it subtle! Mentioning it several times might actually annoy the journalist so much, they remove it altogether. Quote yourself in the press release saying 'what the crux of the story is.

**6: Picture perfect.** A major event, opening a new factory or store, or launching a product or service might warrant inviting a photographer from your local paper. If a photographer does arrive (and there is a lot of competition for their time), make sure there is someone available to show him/her around to help them get the photo you and they want!

**Ideally, commission your own professional photographer** - remember: photos can also be used on your website, newsletter, marketing materials. Or, at the very least, if you take your own photos to supply to the media, look carefully at photos in newspapers and magazines and copy that style (**high resolution** is vital – & supply captions).

**7: Include a 'Notes for the news editor' (boiler plate) section** at the end of a release if you need to give more detail to help the journalist understand more complex information. Although you may have been winning coverage in the media regularly, your release might land on the desk of

someone who's just started in the job and has moved from another part of the country. **Don't expect journalists to remember you every time you call!**

**8: Include your contact details** - and make sure you're available to take follow up calls from the media. If you are called, the reporter will be 'hitting a deadline' and want the information fast, or request an immediate 'live' interview for radio or TV. Be clear what they want to know first, then, if you are not confident of the answers, **offer to ring them back five minutes later**, giving you a chance to make a few notes to yourself. Stay calm and focused on what you want to say.

**9: After sending your press release**, you can check the newsroom has received it, to offer additional details if needed and, if you are planning an event, that it is 'in the diary'. **If it is a really strong story, and doesn't get used**, it is perfectly ok to call the reporter or news desk and offer to re-send the release if they ask you to.

**Keep a copy of all press releases you send** and a list of media you sent it to and the date it was sent.

If the story is used, make a note of which media used it. If the article is published under a reporter's name (called a by-line) make a note of that too – **and if they have given your story a really good show, thank them!** Contact the same journalist again, referring to their previous coverage.

**10: Use your press releases as 'Latest News' on your website, Facebook Page and Blog** - and **Tweet** a link to them! Celebrate media coverage with colleagues, staff and regular customers by letting them know, with a link to the coverage. It's good for morale and customer relations.

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You don't pay for a press release to be published, so you can't guarantee that it will be. We're proud of our 99% 'success rate' in getting our clients' stories in their target media. We give you sound, common-sense advice and support based on our experience as journalists and PR professionals. Give us a call for a no-obligation chat about how we can help you! See client testimonials on LinkedIn & on our website.

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