

Press release writing and distribution

A step-by-step guide for small and medium businesses

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Smaller organisations often have high expectations when it comes to marketing. They need value for money when spending on any kind of promotional activity. They also appreciate that more and more business is coming from the web – they know the one way smaller companies can compete with the big boys is to be ‘visible’ online.

Writing and issuing press releases scores on both counts. The cost of researching, writing and distributing press releases is low compared to other forms of marketing such as advertising and direct mail. When it works well you can get noticeable returns. And if you issue press releases regularly and make sure they are available online, they can help drive traffic to your website.

The humble press release may seem like an old-fashioned communications technique, but in fact it has seen a dramatic resurgence. Pragmatic media relations people appreciate the reality that a well-written release can get excellent results. And with today’s online distribution bringing down the cost of delivery and adding a new dimension to the press release as a way of boosting website traffic, it’s a publicity method nobody can afford to ignore.

Smaller organisations can use press releases to generate the kind of publicity that would cost thousands of pounds to achieve with other forms of marketing. Media coverage helps to generate sales, improve your status among existing customers, aid recruitment and attract investors. And the fact that press releases can help boost website traffic makes them even more effective for smaller businesses. Even if you do no other public relations activity, it can be well worthwhile to issue a press release every now and then. It’s unlikely that every press release will result in media coverage, but if they’re done properly each one can enhance your online ‘visibility’.

The evolution of a good press release

This is a quick step-by-step guide to the process you will need to go through to produce an effective press release. Read the main whitepaper on www.dwpub.com/whitepapers and use this as a checklist.

1. Consider your ultimate audience – the people you want to reach with your message. This will help you decide which media outlets to target and who should be on your ‘press list’
2. Talk to your colleagues, find out what’s going on that could make a story. The more people you talk to the better
3. Get your facts and quotes together. Look for strong facts about your company or product, perhaps something relating to a major issue of the day
4. Write your press release. Put the best bit first and keep it short – 400 words is more than enough
5. Make sure your headline is snappy and makes the point. Write it in sentence case
6. Put your contact details at the end of the release. It’s amazing how many people forget this

7. Get your release proof-read, by at least two people
8. Send your release in the body of an email to target press contacts. Don't include attachments in the email
9. Submit your release to a reputable online press release wire service. Make sure your primary keyword is in the headline and in the release as a text link

The starting point

OK – put your pens down, or shut down your computers. The start of the press release writing process is no time to actually start writing.

One of the most common complaints from journalists about the press releases they get is that the people writing those releases haven't thought about the ultimate consumer of their communications – the reader. A journalist's job is almost entirely dictated by the whims of the reader. The objective of any publication, whether online, print, trade or consumer, is to appeal to a closely defined audience. Think about the audience you want to appeal to, and the sort of publications serving this audience. Get into their collective mind, and you'll create 'copy' (that's journalist speak for a bunch of words drawn together to form all or part of an article) that appeals to the right people.

Start to think about your audience right from the start of the whole process. As you get better at writing press releases you'll do this automatically. If you have several different target audiences, you can even consider drafting subtly different releases for each sector. This maximises the chance of your story being picked up by publications with widely different audiences.

The online visibility dimension

Something making big waves in marketing at the moment is search engine optimisation (SEO). What the hell is SEO? Don't be afraid of this rather obscure acronym. You don't need to be a sandal-wearing, long-haired technical boffin to understand how SEO is relevant to your press release and how you can make the most of it.

There are two sides to SEO. Firstly, if your press release is on the internet and it includes a link to your own website, it will help drive traffic to your site. People find your release, then click through to the site. The effectiveness of this depends on where your release is available on the internet (its visibility) and how relevant the release is to the website it links to.

Secondly, press releases on the internet can actually boost your traffic direct from search engines. One of the ways search engines like Google decide how high up on a list of search results a particular website should appear is by the number of other websites that link to it. Therefore, the more links to your website you have from other sites, the better your 'search engine rankings' will be. And the better your search engine rankings, the more visits your website is likely to get.

The moral of the story is that PR should be a regular part of your marketing activity. Press releases are an effective way to boost your business through gaining media coverage and increasing your visibility online. Done well and done regularly any business can reap the benefits. Quite simply, every business – large or small – should be doing it.

In the full whitepaper at www.dwpub.com/whitepapers I offer an explanation of the other points to consider when writing and distributing your press release.