The Art of the Press Release, or
How to Write a Press Release That Actually Gets Read

Ah, the press release. Many are sent. Few (according to editors and reporters) are read. Why does this public relations paradox exist?

Numerous journalists have explained their reasons for disregarding releases—the same releases written by hard-working people charged with getting their organizations' news out. In a nutshell, journalists say that most press releases:

➢ Don't communicate anything newsworthy

➢ Are too long

➢ Are not well written

Even if you have the cleanest, most targeted media distribution list in the world, your efforts will be for naught if the recipients of your press release don't read it. This article will provide you with basic tips on writing a decent, functional press release that should at least get read, if not acted upon, along with a sample press release.

Make it newsworthy

Send out a release if, and only if, you have concrete news to announce. Think objectively about whether you've seen topics like yours covered in the media. If not, don't send a release out. For instance, the availability of your organization's new brochure or annual report is not a newsworthy event. You'd be better off sending a hand-written note with a copy to your key media.

Good reasons to send out a release are:

➢ New products or services

➢ Hires or strategic partnerships

➢ Awards/funding received

➢ Major sales

➢ Upcoming events

➢ Projects successfully completed with results

In addition, media love trends and documented statistics. If you can connect your news with a bigger story, your release becomes much more relevant. Some examples:

Your news	Trends/statistics to underscore your news
Development of a new drug to combat high blood pressure	Recent studies indicating that high blood pressure is again on the rise in the U.S.
Sizable new order for your computer chips	Mention of other news indicating that the industry is coming back to life after a downturn
Golf tournament to raise funds for a new homeless shelter	Statistics detailing the rise in homelessness in your city
Foundation grant for your program to foster entrepreneurship among women	Statistics revealing the number of DBAs being obtained by women in your region

Make it short

A release should be no more than two pages long, including any "boilerplate" information on your organization. (Indeed, many editors and reporters say that they rarely read a release beyond the first couple of paragraphs.) Sacrifice is the essence of brevity, so you'll have to think long and hard about what information really needs to appear in your release.

As well, you might be pressed to add quotations from executives or other noteworthy people. If so, maintain your release's conciseness by making sure the quotations add vital information, rather than just expressing how "pleased" or honored" the quoted person is about the topic.

Make it readable

Read your favorite reporters or publications to discover how their stories are structured and written. You'll see that in most hard news articles, the key information is right in the first ("lead") paragraph. If your news is more light-hearted, look at feature articles to get some ideas on how you might approach your release. The closer you can make your release to the actual story that could result from it, the better.

Briefly:

Avoid jargon. Often, those of us who are asked to write releases are so immersed in our organization's culture that we take for granted what the public at large (including media) might or might not understand. Press releases from high-tech firms are notorious for being totally incomprehensible. Try writing as if you're telling the news to a parent or a teenager.

Listen for the rhythm. Keep your sentences relatively short and punchy. A good way to check the writing is to read your release out loud—or, even better, have someone else read it out loud for you. You'll hear the places where the writing is labored.

Proofread! Make sure someone besides you reads your release for grammatical and typographic errors before your distribute it. Any professional writer will tell you that it's impossible to proof your own work.

If you need help writing press releases, check with an independent public relations consultant or professional. S/he can offer release writing and media relations services without the sticker shock of a public relations agency.

Sample press release

Media contact: John Smith
(000) 000-0000
john_smith@anytown.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ANYTOWN COMMUNITY COLLEGE FIRST IN STATE
TO OFFER NETWORK ADMINISTRATION CERTIFICATION

Offering meets documented industry needs

ANYTOWN, ANYSTATE, August 3, 2005 – More than 1,000,000 unfilled jobs for qualified computer technicians are driving thousands to obtain certification for network administration and a new career. Now, Anytown Community College (ACC) is the first two-year school in Anystate to provide courses leading to a network administration certification.

ACC's new program ensures that students graduating with their certification will be fully qualified for positions as network managers, system administrators and other roles that require an in-depth knowledge of network hardware, software and troubleshooting.

"We conducted research and determined that companies statewide—and across the country—have serious network administration needs," said Jane Doe, president, ACC. "Based on our years of experience in education, we developed the only program in the state that provides the necessary training and certification students need to land jobs as network administrators."

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The school's network administration program offers courses in

- All major operating systems

Bullets are a reader-friendly way to give details

- Intranets and extranets

- Network design and troubleshooting

- And more.

For information, visit www.anytown.edu or call 888-000-0000.

About ACC

Offering high-quality, low-cost education to Western Anystate for more than 50 years, ACC continues its commitment to provide excellent public, post-secondary educational programs, community outreach activities and related services. From associate's degrees to specialized certificate programs to workforce development, ACC provides its diverse student body with the opportunity to develop academically, as well as socially, and fosters cooperative partnerships with local businesses and universities.

The last paragraph is the "boilerplate," giving basic information about the organization

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This means "the end"

Author: Grace Lazzara, President of G. Lazzara, Inc., wrote this white paper. eXubrio has permission from G. Lazzara, Inc., to publish this white paper.

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