

Rotary District 9810 Marketing and Membership Workshop
15 April 2010

How to write a Media Release – notes by Committee Chair Geoff Haw

Philosophical Basis: Unless a club interacts with the local community, and this is well known, the natural pool of potential members will not be attracted to your club. It is essential that each club actively promotes its contributions to the local community in a range of ways. One such way is by getting publicity in local papers.

- **Local press:** Don't underestimate the power of the local press. Lots of people skim local papers before throwing them in the recycling bin and your story might just catch their eye.
- Press releases conform to an established format. Journalist receive so many press releases a day, they have set standards and expectations that you must conform to just to have your release read, let alone published. If your press release is printed 'as is', without changing even one word, then you know you have conformed to the journalistic standards of that particular medium. "Write on", you're doing a great job!
- By definition a press release is simply a statement prepared for distribution to the media. The purpose of a press release is to give journalists information that is useful, accurate and interesting.
- No rigid rules but follow some guidelines to give your media release the best chance.
- Journalists complain about media releases from many organisations: not professionally presented, too long, and do not come to the point quickly enough.
- Two things to keep in mind when deciding what exactly to write in your release: newsworthiness and timeliness. Basically, will this story interest this particular publication's readers right now?
- Keep the text short – ideally one side of a single A4 page of letterhead. Material should be one-and-a-half-line spaced and in a common font. Set generous margins to allow for notes by journalist.
- Do not include fancy computer graphics, etc. to decorate your printed page.
- Head the page – MEDIA RELEASE (not press release).
- Make it clear when information can be used e.g. "For Immediate Release" or "embargoed until..." [date and time]
- Provide a heading which identifies the subject matter of your media release, but don't try to write a catchy 'headline'. Paper will do that.
- The first paragraph is the most important part of the media release and should include key information. An old journalist's trick is to remember the five Ws: who, what, when, where, why, and if relevant, how?
- Find an 'angle' in your story – something particularly newsworthy about your project/activity that will attract a journalist's interest. Is it the first? The biggest? The oldest. The richest?
- Try to make your press release timely. Tie your news to current events or social issues if possible. Make sure that your story has a good news hook.
- The second 'informative' paragraph is generally a quote that gives the release a personal touch. Touchy-feelies go a long way with journalists. Press releases and news stories are boring to journalists without a 'human interest'.
- Supply all information that will help the journalist.
- If photos are to be included, caption them and make sure they are of good quality.
- Some papers prefer to use their own photographers.
- At end of release include the name and contact details of person/s who can give more detail.
- Use clear, accessible everyday language, suitable to the readers.
- Avoid long sentences.
- Paragraphs may often be just one sentence.
- Use quotes from relevant people when possible.
- Use the main part for more detailed discussion of the information provided in the first 1-2 paragraphs.
- Be sure to mention any sponsors.
- Use the pyramid approach. Always assume that the editor will cut your story from the bottom. So, make certain that most important information comes first.
- Think about who in the media might be particularly interested in your project/activity.
- Follow the rules of etiquette and send information to the Editor, but you can also send information to specific journalists if you have a working relationship with them.
- Pay strict attention to deadlines and fax releases if necessary. Plan well ahead.
- You may follow up with a phone call (prior to the event) to ensure that the release has been received. Be prepared to answer questions.
- Check and re-check everything for accuracy. Be especially vigilant of the spelling of names, people's titles, and dates and times.

- Insert information about photo opportunities
- Don't send the release or photos in the body of an email, attach it in a Microsoft Word or PDF file.
- Don't forget to clearly attribute quotes.
- Don't forget to date the release.
- Don't use underline, italics, bold, odd font sizes or any fluff in the presentation of the text.
- Don't use abbreviations.
- Don't use overly technical terms without explanation in footnotes.
- Correct grammar usage. Always follow rules of grammar and style. Errors in grammar and style affect your credibility.
- Mixed case. NEVER SUBMIT A PRESS RELEASE IN ALL UPPER CASE LETTERS.
- Send it to a specific reporter or section editor whenever possible, instead of just sending it to the publication. Very important!
- If you're sending the press release via e-mail as an attachment, make your subject line count. Use 6 or 7 words that will get attention.
- Write in 3rd person. The press release must remain objective. Don't express personal opinions or ideas, unless in quotes. Refrain from using words like; 'I' and 'We', except in quotes.
- Don't use exaggeration words like: cheapest, best, unique or quickest.
- Don't include more than two sentences in a paragraph. A series of one sentence paragraphs is fine.
- Don't jam-pack one release with more than one story or significant issue, spread the news over releases.
- More commonly, journalists will use your press release as a springboard for a larger feature story. In either case, try to develop a story as you would like to have it told. Even if your news is not reprinted verbatim, it may provide an acceptable amount of exposure.
- Economy of words. Use only enough words to tell your story. Keep it concise. Make each word count.
- Beware of jargon.
- It helps if a well-known individual or institution is included in your press release, as they will help draw readers into your story, and make a lasting impression.
- Take time to do it right. Write, print, proof read. Rewrite, edit.
- Be clear about your message and don't try to tell too much. There is only room for one key message in a press release, which is usually short.

If any clubs wish to have advice, assistance or checking, of releases, you may contact either of these Committee members, who will do what they can to assist you. However, the fundamental key to success is to build up a personal working relationship with an editor or reporter.

Geoff Haw, geoff@sagacityservices.com.au (preferred) or phone 0418 580 081

Jeff Steel, jsteel@bigpond.net.au or phone 0419 429 998