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10 Essential Writing Tips to Ensure Your News Release Makes the News

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When a story about you, your work or your company is published as a news article it enhances your visibility, increases your name recognition, and builds your reputation as an expert in your field. No other vehicle is so powerful as raising you above the din of advertising as a well written, target-distributed news release.

Writing a news release is like creating a work of art. Let your ideaphoria flow. If you choose to write your own news release, the article needs to be well written, catch the attention of the editors and have several key characteristics to be successful.

Make it easy for the media to read, edit, and publish your story. Follow the guidelines listed here and your news release will have a much greater chance of being published and broadcast.

- 1) **Make sure the information is newsworthy.** Do not waste the editor's time with non-news or veiled advertisements. Determine the event or news that your company wants to make public and focus the news release on informing about that event and that event only.

Do not roll the text into a quasi advertisement to expound upon the greatness and merits of your company or product. If you do, your "press release" will be canned.

- 2) **Before you write your news release,** write down the most important facts about you news story. After you write them down, prioritize them in order of importance. Choose the top 3 or 4 points you want to communicate and focus the story on these points only.

The number one element on the list will provide you with the key focus of the first paragraph. Do not be tempted to ramble on by presenting additional detail of topics outside of the focus of the release.

- 3) **Write as if you are a news reporter.** When you write your news story take on the role of a reporter presenting the facts to their readers, listeners or viewers. Interview your sources, get quotes, collect pertinent information and craft the information into an informative and professional format. This will make your news release fit the format of a news story and will avoid the common mistake of writing from a "we" or "our" viewpoint.

- 4) **Just the Facts:** Get right to the point. Immediately catch the interest of the editor by providing news that is of interest to their readers/listeners. Determine all of the newsworthy information of your event and write it into a format that presents these facts in a no-nonsense, direct reporting story. Do not get poetic or verbose. This is a news story, not a creative writing piece.

- 5) **Write in simple, well structured understandable sentences.** Avoid long, rambling sentences, use of superlatives, technical language or sales jargon. Remember, for the most part your readers will be the general public. Make the story easy to read.

Draw the reader in with facts but if the facts are technical, explain them in a layperson's language. You want as many people to understand and appreciate your story as possible. If the editor can not make sense of your story, it gets canned.

After you write your news release, have several people read it. Ask people who do not know much about the details in your story to review it and give you their comments. Listen to what they have to say about how the story is understood (or not understood) by them.

- 6) **Create a clever, catchy, newsworthy informative headline** that draws the readers attention. This can be a challenge to be sure. You want to write a headline that, in a few words, encapsulates the most important aspect of your story. A headline is what captures the reader's attention. Then, once

their interest is piqued, the first paragraph should provide them with enough information to interest them to continue reading.

Your headline should be short, concise and a marquee for your story. However, don't agonize over the perfect headline because many times the editor/writer will write their own version for space considerations.

- 7) Include the **Who, What, Why, Where, When, and How** in your first paragraph. It should be able to stand alone. Scan your newspaper and look at how newspaper stories are presented in the first paragraph. You want to follow this tried and true guideline for news articles. It will significantly increase your chances of getting published.

Another benefit of having a powerful first paragraph is, if space is at a premium, (which it often is) your first paragraph can easily be lifted and printed to stand on its own as a mini press release.

Having a story that can say it all in a few sentences increases the chances that your story will be the one published when the editor needs a one or two paragraph insertion. Remember, it is better to be published in abbreviated form than not published at all.

- 8) **Embellish your story and provide more detail** in the second and third paragraphs. As you expand upon your story, elaborate on the core story line with additional information. Provide greater detail of the people and events of your story and create a connection and relationship to the audience and the community.

Connecting your story to the readers/audience and to the community is one of the most powerful tools you can use to increase the chances that your release gets published or broadcast.

Refer to individuals by their complete name the first time you mention them. Include a title and connection to a company or organization. (Mr. Thomas Leighton, President of C.O.B. Industries) When referring to this individual in subsequent sentences, use only their last name. ("At the ceremony (Mr.) Leighton received the award...")

For organizations, write out the complete name the first time followed by an acronym or abbreviation if appropriate. (Coalition for World Peace (CWP) For additional mentions, use the acronym only. ("Recently CWP received national attention for..")

- 9) **Provide additional facts and information** in the fourth and possible fifth paragraph. Provide the editor the option of using this information depending on space limitations. These paragraphs should expand upon your story and provide more detail and facts. They should contain optional information that is not crucial to your story but is still relevant.

Make sure this information follows the story line and stays on track with your key points. Be careful not to wander into other areas and provide information not pertinent to the story. Make sure not to veer off into anything even resembling advertising or self promotion jargon.

- 10) Always **close with an action paragraph** providing contact information such as name, address, phone, fax, e-mail and/or your Web site. This information is critical as it:

- provides your readers with the information they need to contact you so that they can receive further information.
- provides you with critical information and feedback as to where your story has been published or broadcast.

Tracking Tip: When a request for information comes in, make sure you always ask the person calling where they heard about you. In this way you can track the outlets that published/broadcast your story.

You will also gather vital market response information about your audience and the effectiveness of specific media. With this information you will be better able to make informed decisions about where to spend your advertising dollars. It makes sense to advertise where you receive a robust response to your news story.