

Public Relations: 10 Tips for Successful News Releases

By Pauline “Polly” Elmore

Has your company just won an award? Hired a new employee? Opened a new store? Expanded delivery service?

Are you planning a workshop? Are you holding a fundraiser for a non-profit service? Are you participating in a community or civic project?

A good news release can help “get out the word.” In fact, community newspapers have come to rely on local news releases as a major source for their content. Make sure you are a “reliable source.” You must be truthful, accurate and timely with the information you send the media.

Here are my top ten tips for successful news releases:

1. Who? What? When? Where? Why? How? These are the six basic questions you need to consider for any news story. The answer to one of these questions is going to be the lead (the first sentence) for your news release.

- Who you are.
- What you are doing.
- Where you are doing business or where you are holding your event. This can be a geographic place or a marketing niche.
- When you opened for business or when your event is taking place.
- Why you have chosen this particular business, service or event, place or time.
- How you plan to do what you’re doing. What is your strategy?

2. Look for the “hook. What makes you or your project different or unusual?

Try to send more than just a meeting notice. If you are planning an auction, feature an unusual item that you will be offering. If you are selling tomatoes or avocados, explain why your produce is different from that of your competitors.

Do not write a news release the way you would take minutes at a meeting. Forget chronology. Pick the most important fact and write that in your first sentence. Present the rest of your facts in descending order of interest to the reader. This is called the Inverted Pyramid. Editors cut from the bottom of a story. You can lose your most important information if it’s in the last line of the release.

3. Check your facts. Don’t claim what you can’t prove. And don’t exaggerate. You’ve heard the phrase “truth in advertng.” That relates to public relations as well. Don’t claim to have the biggest box in the world unless you have measurements and research to prove it.

4. Use nouns and verbs. Use good strong, active verbs in your news release. Avoid too many adjectives and adverbs (that's where exaggeration tends to sneak in).

5. Send a photo. This is especially easy to do today with digital cameras, scanners and email delivery. Identify the people in your photo from left to right. Actually type in "left to right" or the abbreviation (l-r).

6. Include a contact name and telephone number. Make sure the contact person is going to be accessible when a reporter calls. You can miss the boat - and the next edition - if a reporter needs additional information and cannot reach you during regular business hours.

7. Learn where to send your news release and to whom. Check on the Internet or in the newspaper itself. Many newspapers have started to include their contact information right in the publication. Also, today almost every newspaper has a web site. Many of these sites include guidelines for submitting a release. If you don't know the name of the publication, you can search by state or jurisdiction, then search for "newspapers."

8. When in doubt, call and ask the newsroom for help. Or you can send an email query to the contact person listed on the publication's website. Ask the reporter or editor if she is the right person to receive your information.

9. Use the new technology. Email your release and attach a "jpeg" photo. You should check with the newspaper first to make sure that receiving releases electronically is in keeping with their policy. A follow-up call is always a good idea, unless the publication specifies not to call. Some reporters prefer to communicate strictly by email.

10. Don't overlook the "bread and butter" releases, such as new hires and promotions. They keep your company name before the public and build credibility. Don't expect success every time. But after a few of your releases have appeared, people will begin to recognize the name of your company, product or organization. And you're on your way to success in building your reputation.

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