



Creating a Public Relations Campaign

There are two general ways to get favorable exposure in the media:

- *Advertise* – buy space to deliver the message you want.
- *Public relations* – take advantage of the press’s need for content by becoming the story.

Advertising allows you to control what is printed, but it can be expensive, and readers may perceive advertisements with skepticism. Using a public relations approach reduces your control over what is printed, but is usually free and can enable your message to be seen as news or helpful information by the reader.

General Comments

- The press (newspapers, magazines and trade publications) are always looking for newsworthy information they believe their readers would find interesting, informative or useful.
- The reporters and writers of these publications must create content to fill their “space” in a timely manner.
- The key is making your message the content they can and will use.
- The primary means of contacting those writers is a press release.

Using Press Releases

A press release is simply a document that contains summary information about a topic or event that you want to disseminate. It is best to distribute the press release to actual people like reporters, writers and journalists. If you don’t know a specific person at a publication, you can send it to an editor of the publication or try to direct it to an appropriate department.

Journalists get dozens or hundreds of press releases all the time. To make yours stand out, here are some suggestions.

- *Know whom you are trying to reach.* You really have two audiences – the journalist and the readers of the publication. Journalists spend all their time creating articles that the readers of their publication will find interesting. The nature of their work is that they are busy and operate under deadlines. Therefore, you must create and target your press release to appeal to both the journalist and the ultimate reader.
- *Have a reason for the release.* There must be something of value or “newsworthy” in your release. It may be the introduction of a new product, the launching a new website, the landing of a new major customer or the hiring or promotion of an employee. You can also “create” a “news item” that will be attractive for a story, such as the results of a survey on some topic related to your customers and your business.
- *Write an effective release.* Press releases usually conform to a standard format. They should include enough information to enable the journalist to write a short story and complete contact information so the journalist can contact you for more information for a longer story. Try to include a quote and information on your company. There is a sample at the end of this article.
- *Distribute the release effectively.* After creating the release, you must get it to the right people. If your ultimate audience is the general public, send it to local newspapers and magazines. If your audience is a certain type of business, send the release to all of the trade publications that your customers read.

If at all possible, direct the release to the specific person who is most likely to be writing about your topic. Look at old copies of trade publications for reporters' names. If the release is about a new product or employee promotion, find the editor of the section of the publication that deals with those items. If you can't find a specific writer's name, send the release to the publication's editor. As a last resort, send the release to "The XYZ Publication, Attention – Editor." The more personal you make it, the more likely it will get attention.

More and more press releases are being sent via email. It is faster, cheaper and usually easier. If you choose email, incorporate the release into the body of the email instead of sending an attachment. You can also send the releases by regular mail and by fax.

Be available for follow up. Understand that journalists operate under the constant pressure of meeting printing deadlines. If a journalist calls, try to take the call or return it immediately. You should also ask what type of time constraints the person has.

Nurture a relationship with the writer. Journalists are always looking for sources of good article ideas. Try to position yourself as an insightful and informed expert on your market. You never know when you may get a call and have the opportunity to get message told again.