

Write a Press Release

If you want people to know about your fundraising activity, then tell the press and media about it – it's very easy to do.

A **press release** is simply a written statement distributed to the media. Reporters are more likely to consider a story idea if they first receive a release. It is a fundamental tool of PR work, one that anyone who's willing to use the proper format can use.

- 1. Write the headline.** It should be brief, clear and to the point: an ultra-compact version of the press release's key point.
 - Press release headlines should have a "grabber" to attract readers, i.e., journalists, just as a newspaper headline is meant to grab readers. It may describe the latest achievement of an organization, a recent newsworthy event, a raffle. For example, "XYZ host charity ball for Rainbows."
 - Headlines are written in bold and are typically larger than the press release text.
 - The simplest method to arrive at the press release headline is to extract the most important keywords from your press release. Now from these keywords, try to frame a logical and attention-getting statement. Using keywords will give you better visibility in search engines, and it will be simpler for journalists and readers to get the idea of the press release content.
- 2. Write the press release body copy.** The press release should be written as you want it to appear in a news story.
 - Start with the date and town.
 - The lead, or first sentence, should grab the reader and say concisely what is happening. The next 1-2 sentences then expand upon the lead. i.e. "XYZ is to hold a charity ball on Wednesday, 22nd January at Pride Park Stadium. All proceeds will go to Rainbows."
 - The press release **body copy** should be compact. Avoid using very long sentences and paragraphs. Avoid repetition and over use of fancy language and jargon.
 - A first paragraph (two to three sentences) must actually sum up the press release and the further content must elaborate it. In a fast-paced world, neither journalists nor other readers would read the entire press release if the start of the article didn't generate interest.
 - Deal with actual facts - events, products, services, people, targets, goals, plans, projects. Try to provide maximum use of concrete facts. A simple method for writing an effective press release is to make a list of following things:
- 3. Communicate the 5 Ws and the H.** Who, what, when, where, why, and how. Then consider the points below if pertinent.
 - What is the actual news?
 - Why this is news?
 - The people, products, items, dates and other things related with the news.
 - The purpose behind the news.
 - Your company - the source of this news.
 - Now from the points gathered, try to construct paragraphs and assemble them sequentially: The

headline > the summary or introduction of the news > event or achievements > product > people > again the concluding summary > the company.

- The length of a press release should be no more than three pages and can be as short as a few lines. If you are sending a hard copy, text should be double-spaced.
 - The more newsworthy you make the press release copy, the better the chances of it being selected by a journalist or reporting.
4. **Include information about You.** When a journalist picks up your press release for a story, he/she would logically have to mention the you or your group in the news article. Journalists can then get information from this section.
- The title for this section should be - About XYZ_COMPANY/Group
 - After the title, use a paragraph or two to describe your company/group with 5/6 lines each.
4. **Tie it together.** Provide some extra information links that support your press release.
5. **Add contact information.** If your press release is really newsworthy, journalists would surely like more information or would like to interview key people associated with it.
- If you are comfortable with the idea of letting your key people being directly contacted by media, you can provide their contact details on the press release page itself. For example, in case of some innovation, you can provide the contact information of your engineering or research team for the media.

Tips

- If the press release is for immediate release, you may write "IMMEDIATE RELEASE" in all caps on the left margin, directly above the headline. If the release is embargoed, put "EMBARGOED UNTIL..." with the date you want the story released. A release with no release date is presumed to be for immediate release.
- Research actual press releases on the web to get the feel of the tone, the language, the structure and the format of a press release.
- The timing of the press release is very important. It must be relevant and recent news, not too old and not too distant.
- A follow-up call can help develop a press release into a full story.
- Include a "call to action" in your release. This is information on what you want the public to do with the information that you are releasing. For example, do you want them to buy a product? If so, include information on where the product is available. Do you want them to visit your Web site to enter a contest or learn more about your organization? If so, include the Web address or a phone number.
- Do not waste time writing the headline until the release is done. Copy editors write the real headlines in newspapers and magazines, but it is good to come up with a catchy title or "headline" for the release. This headline may be your only chance. Keep it concise and factual. But if you try to write it before you write the release, you waste time. You don't know yet exactly what you - or those you interview, will say. When you have finished a draft of the release, you may decide to revise your lead -- or not. Then and only then think about the headline.
- Send your release by e-mail, and use formatting sparingly. Giant type and multiple colors don't enhance

your news, they distract from it. Put the release in the body of the e-mail, not as an attachment. If you must use an attachment, make it a plain text or Rich Text Format file. Word documents are acceptable at most outlets, but if you are using the newest version (.docx), save down a version (.doc). Newspapers, especially, are on tight budgets now, and many have not upgraded. Use PDF files only if you are sending a full media kit with lots of graphics. Please don't type a release on letterhead, scan it, and e-mail a jpeg of the scan. That's a waste of your time and the editor's. Just type the release into the e-mail message.

- Use your headline as the subject line of the e-mail. If you've written a good "grabber" headline, this will help your message stand out in the editor's e-mail inbox.
- Craft each release to target a specific media outlet and send it to the specific reporter who covers that beat. This information can usually be found on the outlet's Web site. Blasting the identical press release to multiple outlets and multiple reporters at the same outlet is a sign that you are taking shortcuts rather than targeting a specific market.

Warnings

- Always remember that editors are overworked and understaffed. If you can make life easier for them, you're more likely to get coverage. If you write a press release that's close to the way the editor will actually publish it, it may see publication with minimal editing. But if you fill it with fluffy advertising copy, don't use proper AP style, etc., the editor must severely edit your piece to use it. That means he or she is more likely to just move on to the next press release--and there are plenty of them.
- When e-mailing a press release, do not make the subject line of your e-mail "press release." You will only blend into the crowd. Get the editor's attention by making the subject line your "grabber" headline, e.g. "Brand Co. Aims to raise £30,000 for Rainbows."