

How to Write a Press Release

7 Starter Tips to Get the Word Out About Your Business

If you have news to share with a large audience, write and distribute a press release. It is the most cost-effective way to announce important information quickly and easily, build brand awareness and increase website traffic.

"As a Mompreneur working with a tight budget, we distributed a press release to introduce our new site for self-published authors and offer valuable information," says Jill Exler, founder of jexbo. "This simple document helped us generate awareness and increase site traffic quickly, and we plan to send additional releases out in the future to help our business grow."

But what exactly is a press release? Basically, it is a document announcing some kind of news or event about your organization that you send to targeted media members, partners, customers, investors, and other pertinent people. It should be truthful, newsworthy, and easy-to-read.

With this in mind, it takes time and skill to create a good press release so you may want to outsource this work to an expert. But if you'd like to do it yourself, here are a few tips to help you get started:

- Review competitor news and press releases from successful businesses.

This will give you an idea of how effective press releases look and sound. Also read the press releases found at the Associated Press, <http://customwire.ap.org/specials/bluepage.html>, PR Newswire, www.prnewswire.com, and BusinessWire, www.businesswire.com. These organizations usually follow the "Associated Press Style Guide," <http://www.apstylebook.com/>, so you can use these releases as a guideline to write your own.

- Create a headline that conveys the main message without clichs, gimmicks or extra copy.

Try to stress a benefit and use action verbs written in the present tense. You can also add a short, sub-headline to provide additional information and increase search-engine optimization.

- Place important data at the top of your press release.

Note that your headline may be the only copy "picked up" by search engines and other news sites. Plus, reporters often stop reading after the headline and first paragraph so ensure that all key points are noted in the beginning of your release.

- Focus on the benefits - not the features.

As you're writing, think about the key elements that your audience will find interesting. What's in it for them? Insert quotes from pertinent people. But try to avoid blatant statements about your "excitement" over the news. Instead, use the quote to provide valuable new information, statistics or data.

- Include a boiler plate.

This is a brief paragraph at the end of a press release that provides succinct information about your organization. It is essential to include contact data here so that media members can easily reach you at any time.

- Proofread.

When you are finished, have someone check your work for errors, tone and newsworthiness. This way, your press release will convey valid, interesting information to help build credibility and generate interest.

- Get the word out.

To distribute your news appropriately, conduct online research. There are numerous resources available at various prices to help you reach specific audiences, take advantage of RSS feeds, record podcasts, increase search-engine optimization, add more depending on your news topic and budget.

"Rather than waiting for the evening news or the morning paper, 130 million Americans get their daily news through search engines like Google and Yahoo!," says Bill Wagner, CMO at Vocus, Inc., an on-demand software company for public relations management. "Today's multimedia news releases include links and keywords to complement your marketing strategy and lead potential buyers straight to your website."

Obviously, these are just a few tips to help you get started. To improve your skills, practice often and review well-written press releases that you see in major media venues. And to avoid frustration, think of a press release as a relationship-builder to remind customers and reporters that you offer current information and valuable services.

After all, you may get a lot of attention from your press release, or very little. It really depends on your content, distribution and pitching methods. But after some practice, you'll be able to create effective press releases that will successfully help grow your business.