

How to Write a Press Release

Courtesy of Diane Blaskiewicz, Director of Marketing for Saint Louis Closet Co. and Saint Louis Cellars Food & Wine

A press release is one of the primary ways you can communicate news about your company to the media. Reporters, editors, and producers are hungry for news, and they often depend on releases to tip them off to new and unusual products, company trends, tips and hints, and other developments. In fact, much of what you read in newspapers, magazines, or trade publications, hear on the radio or see on television originated in press release form. Unfortunately, the average editor receives as many as several hundred press releases each week, the vast majority of which end up getting "filed." Your challenge is to create a release that makes the journalist want to know more and discover that your story is one they must tell.

10 Press Release Writing Tips

Use these 10 tips to write a release that will get noticed!

1. Use an active headline to grab the reporter's attention

The headline makes your release stand out. Keep it short, active, and descriptive; in other words, use something like "Tom Named Man of the Year" instead of "Tom Gets Award."

2. Put the most important information at the beginning

This is a tried and true rule of journalism. The reporter should be able to tell what the release is about from the first two paragraphs. In fact, chances are that's all they may read. So don't hide good information. And remember the "5 W's and the H" - make sure your release provides answers to Who, What, When, Where, Why and How.

3. Avoid hype and unsubstantiated claims

A writer can smell a sales pitch a mile away. Instead of making over-inflated statements, provide real, usable information. Find legitimate ways to set you and your company apart. To promote your business, write a release that answers questions about your business, rather than one that provides only general statements about how great or interesting your business is without saying why.

4. Be active and to the point

Use language that will get the reader as excited about your news as you are. If they are not excited, why would they interview you?

5. Keep your release to one page

On the rare occasion, you can opt for a second page if it is necessary to provide critical details. Otherwise, if you can't state your message in a page, you're not getting to the point.

6. Include a live contact

Make sure your release has a person the journalist can contact for more information. This person should be familiar with all the news in the release, and should be ready to answer questions. And issue the release on your company letterhead - it looks professional and gives the writer another way to reach your firm.

7. Keep lingo to the minimum

If you're in a technical field, try not to use technical terms. Many reporters are not as intimate with your company or your industry as you are. Remember use real English, not lingo.

8. Stress benefits

This falls into the category of "don't say it, show it." Avoid saying something is "unique" or "the best." Instead, show how people will benefit - i.e. save time, save money, make their life easier, etc. "Why do people need to know this?"

9. Be specific and detailed

The reader needs to be able to visualize a new product, or know how a new service works. If in doubt, have someone unfamiliar with your product or service read the release and ask them to describe what you are trying to say. And it's better to use too many details than too few.

10. Proofread, Proofread, Proofread

Don't trust your word processing program to catch errors in grammar and spelling. Have a few people read the release before sending it out.

When to Send Your News

Daily Newspapers Business and general assignment reporters working for newspapers and online dailies turn around stories within 24 and 48 hours. However, feature writers are working on stories weeks in advance of publication date. Press Releases about special events or with holiday tie-ins should be sent a minimum of three weeks in advance so the reporter has ample time to research and write the story.

Monthly Magazines Monthly publications close editorial content two months in advance of the issue date. It is not unusual for writers to be deciding on story content for a December issue in September. Stories with a holiday theme should be sent to allow the reporter ample time for research and coverage.

Radio and Television Radio or television stations may plug your Website or product and perhaps be interested in having a representative from your company appear on one of their programs. Because interviews can be held over the telephone you might receive a call in the afternoon for a show airing that evening. Be prepared. Designate someone from your company as the spokesperson and have them prep for the show. In some cases you can ask the show's producer for a list of questions you will be asked. Plan how you will reply to the questions. Also plan how you will respond to the interviewer if they ask questions you do not wish to answer.

Sample Press Release

For Release: 12:00 p.m. EDT, August 18, 2005

Contact:

Karen E. Lake Director of Communication (xxx) xxx-xxxx, E-mail: kel@kellog.org

Kellogg Foundation names new CEO

BATTLE CREEK, Michigan – Sterling Speirn of San Mateo, California, has been named as the new president and CEO of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Speirn, who is currently the president and CEO of Peninsula Community Foundation, a leader in Peninsula and Silicon Valley community philanthropy and one of the Bay Area's largest foundations, will replace William C. Richardson, who will retire from the Foundation December 31, 2005.

"We believe that Sterling Speirn has the proven ability to continue the Foundation's mission in new and exciting ways," said Hanmin Liu, Kellogg Foundation Board chair. "Speirn understands that much of the change we see today happens at the local level. Importantly, he brings to the Foundation experience and understanding of giving at the local level. This experience, coupled with his unique combination of professional and personal strengths makes him extremely well-qualified to lead one of the world's largest philanthropies."

Speirn will be one of a handful of presidents who have led the Foundation since it was established by breakfast cereal pioneer W.K. Kellogg in 1930.

"Being asked to serve as the Foundation's president and CEO is both an honor and a privilege," said Speirn. "The W.K. Kellogg Foundation has a well-deserved reputation as an exemplary leader in the field of philanthropy. Its record of innovation, its commitment to the values and vision of its founder, its stewardship of resources, and its partnership and support of strong leaders and institutions have created a truly unique record over the past 75 years. I look forward to the opportunity to contribute to the Kellogg Foundation's work and the success of the Foundation embodied by its grantees. For me, there is no more important or meaningful work."

The W.K. Kellogg Foundation was established in 1930 "to help people help themselves through the practical application of knowledge and resources to improve their quality of life and that of future generations." To achieve the greatest impact, the Foundation targets its grants toward specific areas. These include: health; food systems and rural development; youth and education; and philanthropy and volunteerism. Within these areas, attention is given to exploring learning opportunities in leadership; information and communication technology; capitalizing on diversity; and social and economic community development. Grants are concentrated in the United States, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the southern African countries of Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Swaziland, and Zimbabwe.

For further information, please visit the Foundation's web site at www.wkkf.org. The site offers in-depth information about the Foundation's programming interests, information on the Foundation's grant application process, a database of current grant recipients, and access to numerous publications which report on Foundation-funded projects.

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