Writing A Press Release

Publicity is increasingly vital to the success of business today. The press release is one of the most widely used vehicles for publicity. Press releases are written to shape public perceptions of an organization through the "news" that is distributed about that organization by that organization. Although press releases should be honest and factual, most are shaped to reflect a positive image. Examples include:

- Announcing new developments, product lines or services
- Explaining "the other side" of negative events (damage control)
- Making the general public aware of information that may affect them (e.g., recalls)

Press releases conform to an established format. Journalists receive so many press releases a day that they have set standards and expectations just to have your release read, let alone published. Also, most editors print or broadcast the news releases that are better written, and that appear to offer broadly relevant information to the public. A sample press release follows:

Sample Press Release

NEWS RELEASE
January 1, 2009
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact Information:
Mr. John Doe
1 Anywhere Street
Anytown, USA  00000
Phone:  (413) 000-0000
E-mail: address@domain.com

TITLE AS A HEADLINE OF A NEWS STORY

Use an effective subtitle that grabs attention and makes the reader want to read further...

AMHERST, MA - Use 30 words or less in the opening paragraph. Keep release to two pages double spaced or one page single-spaced. Make sure the first 10 words are effective, as they are the most important.

The body content should be easy and interesting to read, using vivid language and clean, crisp sentences. Write in an "inverted pyramid" style. Put the most important idea at the top of the first paragraph. Use the WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, WHY approach to writing a press release.
For example: Acmetown, MA--The Acme Company will hold its annual potluck dinner for employees and families on August 31, 2006 at the Acme Town Meeting Hall, 1000 Main Street. "It will be spectacular," said Acme President Albert Acme.

Make the press release read like a news story—convince the reporter/editor that the story is newsworthy. Check newsworthiness. Is it CURRENT, CLEVER and IMPORTANT? Tell the "how" or "why" in greater detail. Anticipate and respond to the "so what" question in the reader's mind. Show, don't tell. Use active verbs and voice. Use quotes. NO PASSIVE VOICE.

Some important considerations in writing the press release are style, persuasion and accuracy of information. Create pictures in the readers' heads rather than talking in abstract. Provide valuable and complete information that hooks the reader - creating the incentive to not only read the whole release, but to compel the reader to action, to attend the event, or to get more information. Make sure all information and figures are accurate. Discard information whose accuracy cannot be verified.

Format is as essential as the content to the effectiveness of the press release. Type the press release on letter size paper, double spaced with wide margins on only one side of the paper. For the second page, write -MORE- at the bottom of the first page. At the end of the story, place -30- or ###. Use pre-printed letterhead, but if the organization does not use this kind of letterhead, include the following information at the top: name, address, phone and fax numbers of the distributing organization; name and direct phone number of the person to be contacted in case the editor has questions about the content; date of the release. Provide contact information and the release date on the top left side of the press release.

###

Remember to review, proofread, and revise your press release. Have someone else look over your draft as well - as two sets of eyes are better than one!

References:


Cowan, J. Techniques for Communicators, Chicago, IL: Ragan Communications, Inc.