



# In Print

FOLLOW THESE 10 INSIDER SECRETS TO SEE YOUR NEWS IN THE HEADLINES

By Lisa Horn, CAS

**NEWS RELEASES:** Those ubiquitous documents used to communicate with the media. While ever-present in every newsroom and editorial office, many marketers underestimate the importance and value of the press release. In fact, some have even surmised the mortality of the news release by claiming it dead.

But the fact is, the news release is alive and well—if done right to meet the needs of today’s busy journalists who are cranking out the daily, weekly or monthly news. First, news releases succinctly collect all the facts about an event or happening—the who, what, when, where, why and how that is pertinent to telling any kind of story. Second, news releases *(should)* give context and explain why this news is important, timely and matters to the targeted publication’s audience.

As the former editor of this fine publication, I’ve seen my fair share of press releases—and unfortunately not all of them were good. So how do you keep your news release out of the trash can and get it at the top of an editor’s list? Follow these insider secrets:

## NEWS RELEASES

### 1. Develop Your Media List

Before you can begin writing your first news release, you must first determine the media outlets of interest. While many would like to be featured in high-profile newsstand publications such as *Forbes*, *Entrepreneur* or *Fast Company*, competition for ink in these magazines is fierce and breaking through is difficult—and unlikely. (Sorry to burst your bubble!)

Rather, look at your goals and determine which media outlets align with the content you have to offer. Do you want to boost your reputation within the promotional products industry? Be featured in B2B publications your clients and prospects read? Gain prominence in your local market?

Once you establish the publications of interest, identify the appropriate recipient for your press release. If it’s not evident who covers your kind of news on the publication’s website or in its masthead, call to ask, and get the person’s email or mailing address (more on that below). Also get the correct spelling of the person’s name—nothing offends a journalist faster than someone misspelling his or her name.

*For your news release to even be considered for publication, the headline must immediately grab their attention and the first paragraph must entice them to keep reading.*

### 2. Understand What Constitutes News

What's news? It depends, of course. The definition differs from publication to publication, contingent upon the audience of each (which you've already identified by developing your media list). For promotional products industry publications, news typically revolves around new hires and promotions, awards and recognition, company updates (facility expansions, equipment additions, policy changes, etc.), mergers and acquisitions, events (open houses, shows, etc.) and charitable giving (donations, participation in a 5K, etc.).

News releases can also be written for new product introductions, but these are typically not published in industry e-newsletters. Rather, product-based news releases are used by editors when selecting products for editorial within the printed publications.

When looking outside the industry to obtain coverage in local newspapers or regional business press, frame the release with the local angle in mind. For example, let's say your business is growing and you're expanding operations. How will this impact the local economy? How many jobs will it create? Include this kind of detail to pique reporters' interest.

### 3. Be Audience Centric

Before ever putting pen to paper (or fingertips to keyboard), you must understand the needs of your audience. When talking about the media, this means not only the audience of journalists to which you're pitching news but also their respective publications' readership.

One of the biggest mistakes marketers make when submitting news to the media is writing it from the perspective of why the information is really important to their company. Instead, demonstrate to the media why they, and their readers, should *care*.

### 4. Grab Attention Immediately

With the size of newsrooms and editorial staffs continuing to diminish, reporters are working harder than ever before—and getting their attention isn't easy. For your news release to even be considered for publication, the headline must immediately grab their attention and the first paragraph must entice them to keep reading.

"ABC Company Announces [fill in the blank] ..." isn't going to cut it. Use action verbs—celebrates, completes, consolidates, creates, expands, grows, helps, hires, honors, hosts, introduces, launches, offers, opens, produces, publishes, renews, reveals, upgrades, unveils, welcomes, wins—to more accurately describe the news. Follow this with an introductory paragraph that contains the most pertinent details—and present this information in a way that engages the reader.

### 5. Tell A Story

So how do you engage the reader? By telling a story. Just because it's a news release doesn't mean it shouldn't be enticing. The dry, formulaic approach news releases took in the past is passé. Forgo the tired, uninspired presentation of facts and boost interest by incorporating storytelling principles into your overall news release style. Give context to your news; include an appropriate backstory; make connections to current events; explain the importance—and do it all from the audience's point-of-view.

This said, don't go overboard and write a two-page dissertation when two paragraphs would suffice. Being overly verbose is just as problematic as underdeveloping the key points. The sweet spot is in the middle.

### 6. Eliminate Jargon And Fluff-Filled Quotes

If there's one, sure-fire way to turn off an editor it's submitting news releases filled with industry jargon, acronyms and buzzwords. "Groundbreaking," "unique," "leading," "cutting-edge"—all of these are meaningless without quantification. If you're truly doing something unique, show it through the details surrounding your news.

Another common mistake is including empty quotes from company spokespeople. There's a misconception that news release quotes have to say how excited the company is about the subject of the press release. No! If the company wasn't excited, then why do it? This is understood. Rather, quotes should add context, backstory or additional insight. Forgo the mutual admiration society pleasantries and say something of substance—or say nothing at all.

### 7. Include Photos, Videos Or Other Support Materials

Our society gravitates toward visual stories. Just look at the popularity of Pinterest, Instagram and YouTube. Look for ways to incorporate visuals with your news release to complement the overall story. Held a food drive for local food pantry? Take pictures of staff making the delivery. Built a new wing on your facility to install new equipment? Shoot a video tour of the site. Include these visuals in the proper format to align with publication method. Don't send a low-res photo suitable for web viewing to a print publication that needs 300 dpi images, for example.

### 8. Conclude With An Informative Boilerplate

Don't assume the media know who you are and everything you do. Include a comprehensive, yet brief, boilerplate at the end of the news release. Begin with company name, location, founding date and the types of products and services provided. Substantiate these by demonstrating the company's expertise—awards

received, other news mentions, etc. Conclude with contact info, including your website and social media URLs.

## 9. Submit The News Release To The Media

Most media outlets accept news releases via email, although you'll need to confirm the preferred submission method when developing your media list. When sending the release, don't put "News Release" or "News From ABC Company" in the subject line. For a news editor who gets hundreds of news release submissions per month, this subject line is meaningless. Instead, use the title of the news release: "ABC Company Merges With XYZ Firm; Brings 50 New Jobs To Local Area."

Should you send a blast email to all your contacts or individually submit news to each media outlet? It depends on the kind of news and your relationship with the media contacts. Generally, you'll want to send an individual, targeted email to each publication with personalized comments on what the news release is and why it is relevant for them.

Don't expect to hear back from the media to confirm receipt of your news release. They're too busy to reply to every submission. And calling to confirm receipt is also typically frowned upon.

But if you submit a highly targeted news release that truly has relevance to a publication and you hear nothing after a week or two, it is acceptable to send a follow-up email. Be sure not to take an accusatory tone (why wasn't my news published??). Rather, ask if there's anything you can do in the future to better present information to meet the publication's specific news needs. Journalists are people too, and they need sources to report the news. By simply asking how you can help them, you'll often get the answer of what they need.

And when you do get news placements in publications, say "thank you!" Share the news socially and @mention or tag the media outlet and thank them for the coverage. You can even send a handwritten note of thanks—very few take the time and it will certainly be noticed and appreciated by the journalist.

## 10. Use The News Release As Your Foundation For Other Communication

The news release is written and has been sent to the media. You're done, right? Not yet!

The news release is the foundation for any communications plan because it captures all pertinent details as well as the intended messaging. Use it to create blog posts, social media updates, internal memos, client updates, newsletters, etc.—all with the *consistency* of the original message.

### Use These Ideas To Get Maximum Visibility For Your Information:

- Post a news release to your website on the news/press page.
- If you have a blog, use the news release as the foundation for a more conversational blog post and link back to the original news release on your news page.
- Post the news page link to the news release on Facebook and Twitter. If applicable, tag or @mention any other companies

Want to see examples of news releases that are properly formatted and incorporate all the elements discussed in this story? Check out: <http://thepublicitygal.com/portfolio/press-releases>

For more media relations tips from The Publicity Gal, read "Get Noticed: Six Ways To Become A Go-To Media Source" from the April 2013 issue of *PPB*.

<http://pubs.ppai.org/2013/03/get-noticed>

To submit your press release to *PPB* and *PPB Newslink*, email it to News Editor James Khattak at [jamesk@ppai.org](mailto:jamesk@ppai.org).


Visit <http://pubs.ppai.org/newslink/> to read the current headlines.

included in the release.

- If you have a company newsletter, include a story based on the news release. If the newsletter is electronic, you can link back to the news release online.
- Depending on the nature of the news release, you may want to create a conversational email to send to clients and prospects to alert them to the news.
- Monitor targeted media outlets' Facebook pages and Twitter profiles. If they publish your news, link back to the media coverage on your respective Facebook page or Twitter profile. If the media outlet shared your news on its Facebook page or Twitter profile, then share or retweet that post to credit the original source. Either way, be sure to tag or @mention the media outlet in your post and thank it for the coverage.
- Include any media mentions on your website's news/press page.

## Publicity Boosts Brand Awareness—And Builds Online Reputation

You don't have to be a celebrity to be a newsmaker. Anyone can do it—so long as you have newsworthy stories to share and follow the insider secrets above. A well-rounded marketing plan always includes a publicity component, and the news releases is the foundation for any publicity plan.

By providing relevant news to targeted publications, you can establish yourself as a trusted go-to source and enjoy all the benefits earned media brings. And what's better than seeing your name in print? 

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