



Exclusive Chamber Member Media Guide



Tips for News Releases that Get Results

One of the best ways to promote your business is through a story in a newspaper or magazine, or coverage on television or radio news programs. Unfortunately, many potential self-publicizers do not know how to write a news release that catches and keeps an editor's attention. Follow these tips to create a news release that gets read instead of tossed.

1. **Identify yourself.** If you're mailing or faxing your news release (as opposed to emailing it), print it on company letterhead to clearly identify your company. Be sure to prominently display the words "News Release" on the release.
2. **Start it off right.** In the upper left-hand corner, put "For Immediate Release," or if the release has time value, "Hold Until date/month/year" or "For Release during the Christmas Season." This tells the editor when to use the release. You should keep these to a minimum because most media hate embargos.
3. **Tell them who to call.** On the next line, tell the editors who they can contact for further information by writing: "For Further Information Contact: spokesperson name, phone, fax and email address." Use the name of a person – not just a company name or job title – and make sure to give the person's direct number. Be sure that the person is available.
4. **Grab them with the headline.** The headline is your first and sometimes only chance to grab the editor's attention and make them keep reading. Make it short, clear and interesting. Editors get stacks of news releases everyday. Do not use colored paper, fancy inserts, etc. Such attention-getting gimmicks are the brand of an amateur and many editors will often throw your release away.
5. **Use the five W's (and one H).** Put most of the critical information in the first paragraph, including the five W's and one H: who, what, when, where, why and how. Make sure the first 10 words of the release are effective, as they are important.
6. **Invert your pyramid.** The body of the press release should take the format of an inverted pyramid: critical information goes in the first paragraph, information of next highest importance in the second paragraph, and so on. Sometimes an editor will print a news release as is, and the inverted pyramid format allows him or her to slice off the last paragraph, if necessary, without sacrificing important information.
7. **Cut the hype.** One reason that most information from the news releases never gets news coverage is that they are basically advertisements disguised as news. Make sure the information is newsworthy. What's considered news?
 - An event
 - A new marketing campaign
 - Community service
 - A contest
 - Changes in staff
 - An award
 - A move to a new location or the opening of a new branch
 - A new product or service – but ONLY if it's truly new and unique

Start with a brief description of the news and then distinguish who announced it, not the other way around.

8. Pay attention to the little things. These are the small details that indicate professionalism to an editor.

- Use an easy-to-read typeface such as Times, preferably 12 points.
- Study newspapers to see how their stories are constructed, and construct yours in the same way – including starting with the city of origin and date.
- Send the news release to a specific person whenever possible. Otherwise, address it to a specific editor, such as “Business Editor” or “Food Editor.”
- You don’t need to include a cover letter with your news release. The editor already knows what it is and what to do with it.
- If you’re sending photos with the release, keep in mind that you won’t get them back unless you mark to return the items and include a self-addressed stamped envelope.

Newsworthy or Not?

There are six criteria to follow in evaluating if your company’s news is of value to the media or other organizations.

- **Impact** – includes the number of people it affects, the seriousness of consequences, directness of cause and effect, and the immediacy of the effect.
- **Proximity** – the distance between the audience and the problem or issue of concern. This criterion simply suggests that local connections or news angles increase value.
- **Timeliness** – how perishable the information is. Monthly and weekly print media may be more interested in “why” and “how” than “when”, although daily newspapers remain concerned with the timeliness of information.
- **Prominence** – the extent to which the problem or issue is recognizable and well known
- **Novelty** – unusual, bizarre, deviant and offbeat information attracts people’s interest.
- **Conflict** – strikes, fights, disputes, wars, crime, politics and sports. Conflict is a major ingredient in news due to its appeal.

Who to Send Information To:

Compile a media list including the name of the publication, station or show, the name of the editor, reporter or news director, the mailing address, phone number, fax number and email address. Attached is a list of some local media contacts. This, and other lists, should be updated every three to four month

When to Release Information:

It is essential to establish a mutually beneficial relationship with local reporters. You have information they want and they have the access that you want to

release your information. It is important to realize reporters and their publications live by deadlines. Most commonly, afternoon daily papers have a deadline of approximately 9:30 a.m. and morning daily papers have a deadline of about 4:30 p.m.

Weekend publications are usually put together during the middle of the week, so information received on Friday often does not make the cut. Information should not be released on Fridays because more than likely it will not be covered in the weekend editions of daily publications. It sometimes appears that a company is trying to hide something when it makes a major announcement on a Friday because standard Saturday readership numbers are very low compared to weekdays and Sundays. Busy news days vary depending on the size of the community and the number of news venues in the area.

How to Send Information:

The methods of sending press releases to media contacts have changed in the last few years. Technology has aided in speeding up the process of releasing information. Traditionally, press releases were typed, copied and mailed. Today, many media contacts prefer to receive information electronically, by fax or e-mail, because the information gets into the reporters' hands faster.

When faxing a release to the media there is no need to use a cover page because the release has all the information on it; if it is intended for a specific person, type their name on the top of the release. When e-mailing a news release be sure to include individual addressing – media organization, name, editor or reporter name and title. It is useful to include links to your e-mail and Web site so that more information can be obtained if needed.

Format of a News Release:

News releases should be double-spaced and printed on company letterhead that includes the business' name and address. If a news release is more than one page, the bottom line of the first page should have the word "MORE" centered on the last line. The first line of the second page should have an abbreviated headline and the page number. At the end of a release, the symbols '30' or '###' should be placed in the center of the last line of text to signify that there are no more pages or information. Attached is an example of a news release that can be used as a reference for the format of a release.

Only one side of an 8 ½" X 11" piece of paper should be used. It should be double-spaced and have a minimum of one-inch margins on each side of the page. The word "more" between two dashes (- more -) should be centered at the bottom of the page to let reporters know that another page follows. Use three number symbols (###) immediately following the last paragraph to indicate the end of a press release.

There are seven basic elements every press release should have in terms of

content and how it appears: **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** These words should appear in the upper left-hand margin, just under your letterhead. You should capitalize every letter. **Contact Information:** Skip a line or two after release statement and list the name, title, telephone and fax numbers of your company spokesperson (the person with the information).

Headline: Skip two lines after your contact information and use a boldface type to center the title. Capitalize the first letters of all words in the headline (with the exception of: “a”, “an”, “the” or prepositions such as “of”, “to” or “from”). The combination of upper and lower case makes it easier to read.

Dateline: This should be the city and state abbreviation that your news release is issued from in all capital letters and the date you are mailing your release. Two dashes separate the city and date from each other, and dateline from the text.

Lead Paragraph: The first paragraph needs to grasp the readers’ attention and should contain the relevant information to your message such as the five W’s (who, what, when, where, why).

Text: The main body of your press release is where your message should fully develop.

Effective Leads:

Leads are the first sentence or paragraph in an article or news release. They serve as a hook to make your audience want to know more.

The first couple of paragraphs of a news release answer six basic questions: Who? What? When? Where? Why? How? In the opening sentence, emphasis is placed on what comes first. Rarely are the When and Where important enough to emphasize in the first sentence. Leads usually begin with what happened and/or to whom it happened.

Keep leads fresh by emphasizing the most recent news in the story. Help readers recognize local stories or stories with local tie-ins by playing up the local angle in the lead. Ask yourself how people will be able to relate to this information.

Use the technique of “delayed identification” in the opening paragraph unless the name of the person written about is well known by all readers. In a delayed-identification opening sentence, the person’s name should not be given; rather, the person should be described in a way that helps the reader see the person’s relationship to the story. Explain before you name.

Opening paragraphs should be short – usually 30 words or less. Normally, the opening paragraph is a single sentence. You should streamline your leads by saving “clutter” for later – unfamiliar names, long titles and background.

A well-written lead shows the reader the main ideas in the story in the order of presentation. Thus, a good lead previews the main story and gives the reader a map that lets her see the story from beginning to end.

Text of a Release:

News releases should develop topics in the inverted pyramid sequence. The first paragraph or two summarizes the most important information in the story. The end or outcome of the story is told immediately at the beginning. No major ideas are held back.

After the lead is written, supporting detail is added in decreasing order of importance. If the story must be cut for length from the bottom, this assures that the most essential information will be retained.

All paragraphs should be no more than two or three sentences long. They should be written in third person, avoiding the use of “you”. All paragraphs should be indented ½” or have an extra line space in between them. The last paragraph should be a summary sentence or two about the organization.

If technical language is necessary, make sure it is explained. Using jargon and technical terminology confuses readers and makes it hard for them to understand the information. Make sure your news release contains all critical information, including dates and times. Let editors know if photos, audio or video are available and how they can be obtained.

Releases Containing Photos:

When sending a photograph, illustration or video with a release, make sure to label the item. Photographs should have the person’s name written on the back of the picture. If these items need to be returned, make sure to send a self-addressed stamped envelope with your release.

If you want a certain caption to go with your photo or illustration you should write it as a separate piece of information. The first sentence of the caption should describe what the photo shows, in present tense, and state where and when the photo was taken. The second sentence should give background on the news event or describe why the photo is significant. Whenever possible, try to keep captions to no more than two concise sentences, while including the relevant information. Try to anticipate what information a newspaper editor or reader will need to better understand the photo.

Photos can be prints or electronic images. Prints can be black and white or color and generally of any size. They will be scanned into a black-and-white format. Electronic images should be in JPEG format, at least 200 dpi and e-mailed to the editor.

Editing Tips:

1. Cut meaningless words such as: so, just, oh, however, well, then and but.
2. Avoid beginning sentences with ‘and’ and ‘but’.
3. Avoid weak modifiers (‘helping words’ that have lost their power from overuse) such as: now, seemed, really, even, started, some, always, right, very, all, certainly, definitely, exactly, anyway, this and that.
4. Avoid hedging or waffly words that dilute or tone down a statement, such as: sort

of, kind of, a little, perhaps, somewhat, began to/started to (use these only when showing interrupting action), usually, probably, maybe, rather, fairly, perhaps, quite, look, looking, ish and seeming.

5. Be aware that what is happening in a scene is usually more important than when it is happening. Avoid clogging sentences with “time” words, such as: first, next, then, finally, suddenly, after that, for a while, in a minute, etc.

6. Avoid passive voice. Whenever possible, change ‘was’ or ‘were’ to a more active verb. This will spark action and make the sentence move quicker.

7. Avoid adverbs; they are signs of an amateur. Actions speak louder than adverbs. Example: Change “‘I hate you!’ Krista said angrily” to “‘I hate you! Krista shouted.” The latter sentence shows her anger, rather than telling it.

8. Delete unnecessary adjectives. They make the information seem less newsworthy and more like an advertisement.

9. Read the release aloud to catch word echoes, awkward phrasing, false-sounding dialogue, run-on sentences, slow paragraphs, etc.

10. Make sure that every word, phrase, detail, sentence and paragraph advances and tightens your story.

Responding to Requests for Information:

First of all, you should familiarize yourself with your own organization or company. You should also be aware of the organization’s mission statement, the history of the organization, and basic biographical information on chief executives.

You should be accessible for others to contact you for more information especially after you send out a news release. Make sure the receptionist knows to direct all media inquiries to you, the company spokesperson. Check your messages often and respond quickly to any requests from media for more information.

Following Up:

It is always a good idea to follow up the release of information with a phone call. Give faxed and e-mailed releases one day for a follow up. Mailed releases usually require a three-day period before a follow up call is done. When you call, identify yourself, your organization, and the information the release pertained to. Keep in mind that most editors don’t welcome calls simply checking to see if they received or remember a release.

On follow up calls, be helpful and ready to provide an interview or other solid information. Have some quotes ready in case they are wanted and back-up information ready and available. Leave your name and phone number and remind them not to hesitate to contact you for further information.

Resources and References:

The Associated Press (AP) Stylebook and Libel Manual is a good reference for writing information. *Elements of Style*, by William Strunk and E.B. White, is another great resource for writing tips. It is always a good idea to utilize a thesaurus and dictionary while writing professional releases. Writing handbooks and manuals are also useful for information on grammatical issues.

Various Web pages contain informational writing tips, grammatical resources and sample releases. Some to check out are:

www.columbia.edu/acis/bartleby/strunk, www.twowriters.net,
www.inkspot.com, www.junketstudies.com, and www.press-release-writing.com/

Guidelines for Good Media Relations:

- **Shoot Squarely.** A professional's most important asset in dealing with the media is credibility. This means never lying. If you can't speak the truth, then say nothing. If you don't want a statement quoted, don't make it. If a reporter asks you a question containing offensive information, don't repeat it, even to deny it.
- **Give Service.** The quickest way to gain the cooperation of journalists is to provide them newsworthy, interesting and timely stories and pictures that they want, when they want them, in a form they can readily use. If you don't know the answer to a question, you should follow through by providing the name of someone who would know the information or by getting back to them as soon as possible with an answer.
- **Ask for Corrections.** When a mistake has been made, the best way to get a correction is to handle the situation in a professional manner. Make personal contact with the editor/producer and ask for a correction statement to be published.
- **Do Not Beg.** Nothing irritates the media more than businesses that beg to have stories used or complain about story treatment. Journalists know if information is not newsworthy and no amount of begging can change the quality of the information.
- **Do Not Ask for Kills.** Businesses have no right to ask the press to suppress or kill a story. It is unprofessional and only brings ill will. The only way to keep unfavorable stories out of the press is to prevent situations that produce such stories.
- **Do Not Flood the Media.** Stick to what journalists will consider news and keep mailing lists current.

Get free media coverage in different sections

Public announcement is a way for your company to get media coverage without any charges. On Sundays, the *Kalamazoo Gazette's* Business section publishes announcements free of charge that are considered of interest to the general public.

There are four categories of announcements:

- **People on the Move.** These items announce the new title or working role of people moving from one paid position to another – lateral moves, promotions, people joining a company or taking on new work assignments. Items should include the proper name of the person, his or her new title and, if the title is not readily understandable, a reader-friendly description of the new work assignment. The item also should mention the position or job the person most recently held.

For positions of trust (doctors, lawyers and money managers), include where the person received his or her law degree, medical degree or financial certification.

Also, People on the Move items are the only announcements in the Business section that use photos (head-and-shoulders shots) of the people involved. Photos can be prints or electronic images. Electronic images should be in JPEG format, at least 200 dpi and emailed to photodrop@kalamazoogazette.com.

- **Business meetings.** Meetings that would expand people's knowledge of a subject or allow them to glean information that they can use for business. The meetings should be open to the general public. Announcements should be submitted at least two weeks before the event.

- **New businesses.** This listing announces any new business in the Gazette's readership area; that generally runs from Allegan County in the north, to the Indiana border in the south, from the Lake Michigan shoreline in the west to just the other side of the Calhoun County border in the east.

- **Business Bulletin.** This is the widest category of announcements, offering items of general interest to business readers and others. It includes everything from trade-industry awards and staff re-certifications to location changes and notices of election to a local, regional, state or national business organization.

There are several sections in the *Enterprise*, the Chamber's monthly business publication, available for Chamber members to announce any new business movements of their companies or organizations.

- **Who's New.** This includes announcements about a person – receiving an award, promotion, recognition, etc. A photo can be included.

- **What's New.** This includes announcements about a company, firm, organization, function, event, etc.

- **New Members.** New members have the benefit of inserting a paragraph to describe the business of their organizations or companies.

- **Long Standing Members.** Chamber members who have joined for more than five years are selected randomly to receive recognition.

Press Release Sample (Put company logo at the top of the page)

(Date) Month Day, 2009

Contact: Chris Smith, public relations manager

Phone: (269) 123-4567, ext. 246

Fax: (269) 123-4555

E-mail: chris.smith@kalamazooprint.com

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Headline

KALAMAZOO, Mich. – Lead Paragraph – What is the main focus? Who, What, When, Where, Why?

Body text - What do you want the media to know next? (Include quotes)

Additional information (ticket prices, Web site, etc.)

###

A brief background of the company

Photo attached

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This list is updated quarterly on the Chamber's Web site.

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