Press & PR Toolkit

Effective Press Release Writing

Editorial in print or online almost always has greater credibility than traditional advertising, and writing a good press release can be an inexpensive way to get your key messages out there.

Our members often ask us for tips and advice about how to write press releases, so we've put together this practical checklist which we hope you find useful.

Research

- Decide who you're targeting. What publications (newspapers, magazines, websites etc) do your customers/potential customers read?

- If you're not familiar with these publications, find out more about them so you can develop news stories with real appeal.

- Do they have regular features, sections or themes you can submit ideas for?

- Find out who you should send your press release to and what their copy deadline is. Most publications will have contact details on their website.

The Basics

- Make sure you have a story worth telling. Only write a press release when you have something newsy and relevant.

- Keep sentences short and simple; aim for no more than 300 words at most (or one side of A4). Try reading it out loud – does it sound right?

- Keep it factual; remember you are writing editorial for a newspaper or magazine and not an advertisement, so write your press release in the third person.

  For example: '[Your name of business] is celebrating after winning a prestigious award...'
  NOT 'We are thrilled to announce that we have won a prestigious award...'

- Tell the story in the first paragraph; think Five W's – Who, What, Where, When and Why.

- Avoid clichés – like 'a best kept secret', 'experience something different', 'a hidden gem'.

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- Avoid flowery language e.g. 'wonderful', 'superb', 'breathtaking', 'stunning', 'fantastic'. Please refer to our Mid Wales Brand Guidelines (available on www.mwtcymru.co.uk) if you would like further guidance on copy and images.

- If sending by e-mail put the headline in the subject box – do not just put 'Press Release'.

- Remember the first sentence is what the journalist will see in their in-box. Unless they find this interesting they will often look no further.

- Make sure your contact details, including a telephone number, are at the bottom of the press release.

Format and Style

Headings

Use a letterhead if possible; mark clearly with 'Media Release' or 'Press Release' at the top of the page; add the date; put whether it is 'for immediate use' or if you want it to be published on a specific date put 'embargo until (date)'.

Title

Use a catchy short title - give a sense of the story in a few words. You can often get the headline from the first paragraph (keep it simple). The publication will often use their own anyway).

Quotes

Add a relevant quote or quotations to add interest to your press release. A quote from someone involved should add a new dimension or give a personal side to the story or explain the importance of the story. People quoted should be willing to talk to the press if required.

Contact Details

Name, title, telephone number/mobile phone, address should be included at the bottom of the document/email. Contact details should be on each sheet of additional paper (if attaching a word doc) as sheets can be separated.

Notes for Editors

This is where you fill in the background about your business, organisation or event. Describe who you are, what you do and give basic statistics if applicable.

Images

- Attach good quality high res images if possible. As a guide, we suggest a minimum of 300dpi.

- Label any images and clearly identify people featured in them. Check that you have their permission to send it, and the permission of the photographer.

- High resolution images must be attached separately as jpegs and not embedded in the text.

- Make it clear if there are any photo opportunities linked with the press release - the publication may want to send their own photographer.

Submitting your Press Release

- You should aim to ensure that the release does not leave unanswered questions which require a journalist to make a phone call. The easier you make it for a news desk to use the release, the more likely it is to appear in print or online.

- Remember to include your contact details in case the journalist needs further information. If you don't want these to be published ensure you state this and include them in a separate 'note to editors'. If necessary, you can add more detailed background information here too.

- If you're emailing your press release, make sure that you BCC your recipients; they won't thank you for publicising their email address to all of your contacts. Even better, consider a bulk email system so you're not flagged up as a spammer.

- If you're sending your press release as an email attachment, ensure it's easily editable the other end. We recommend including the text in the body of the email (rather than as an attachment), so it can be easily copied and pasted/edited by the recipient.

- If you have several genuine press releases then try and space them out, don't send them all at once.

MWT Cymru Members - if you would like any further PR advice and support, or to submit press releases to us, please do not hesitate to contact us on 01654 702653 / Email: press@mwtcymru.co.uk