How to Write an Effective News Release

A Guide for Industrial Marketers

THOMASNET

How to Write an Effective News Release

News releases can play an important role in your company's marketing and branding efforts

News releases are an important part of marketing/communications. They are a fundamental tool of public relations and marketing. News releases provide the latest news about your company and its products and services to the media – and to the individuals the media reach.

News releases on new product developments or applications are important to journalists, customers, prospects and even potential partners or investors for a variety of reasons. The type of information news releases provide can be a leading indicator of company performance or market status.

This document describes the uses and value of news releases, the difference between news releases and paid ads, and the steps you can take to write a successful news release. Although there are no guarantees that every news release you write will be noticed, we hope this document will improve your chances.

Why and how your company should use news releases

Traditionally, news releases have been used to communicate information to journalists:
- a new product or service
- a new application or design
- awards or certifications
- opening of a new plant
- new hirings, and
- other important milestones

News releases are distributed to the editors of newspapers, magazines and websites with the hope of catching their attention and being included in an article. The Internet and online media have changed this dynamic, which will be discussed later on in this section.

News releases are short articles about your company, written in journalistic style. Ideally, journalists may include portions of the releases in their own articles or news summaries, or publish what you send verbatim or with minimal changes.

News releases should be written as news stories with eye-catching headlines and body text with the "pertinent facts." In the first 1-2 paragraphs of your news release (also known as the "lead"), you should answer these questions:

> "**Who** is this news release about?"
> "**Wha**t has happened that is newsworthy"?
> "**Where** did the newsworthy event take place?"
> "**When** did this happen?"
> "**How** is this newsworthy?" and
> "**Why** should readers care?"

By answering these questions in your news release, you're making it easy for reporters and your target audience to quickly grasp the message – and they'll be more likely to notice and publish your news

"Newsworthy or not?

A newsworthy story has at least one (and probably more) of the following elements:

Timelines – The story contains NEW information (even if it's about an older product or service).

Impact – The story affects the media's readers, viewers or listeners.

Uniqueness – The story is different from similar stories and offers a different perspective or new information.

Conflict – The story resolves or involves problems or issues.

Proximity – The story describes events that impact the environment of the targeted readers, viewers or listeners, geographically or otherwise.

Celebrity – The story involves or quotes a famous person such as a politician, business/opinion leader or entertainer.

News releases provide a way to build awareness for your company or organization. They are an important component of an integrated marketing and communications campaign but they are not advertising. How do they differ from ads? One major difference is that media publish information from news releases at no charge, unlike paid ads, and readers know this. Having your news mentioned within a newspaper, magazine or online article elevates its credibility, since it's been judged important enough to publish by an objective third party.

News releases are best at informing your audience and telling a story about your organization, where advertising can make a compelling sales message. Advertising can make news releases more effective by creating additional brand awareness. Repeated mentions of your company on both the news and advertising sides will further elevate your profile and generate additional new leads over time.

Journalists, customers and prospects are leery of news releases that read like advertisements and are obviously selling something. You run the risk of alienating editors and reporters, and having any future release seen as suspect if you don't use an objective news-writing style when writing your news releases. With your news releases, make sure there is something truly newsworthy about your announcement.

News releases about a product that has been around awhile without substantial change or "new news" can only negatively affect your credibility. However, if you have an older product that has been significantly changed or has a new feature or application that is news, then journalists and readers will welcome this information.

Make your online news releases "viral"

The Internet has expanded the impact of the news release with a unique "viral" component that improves the chances that your news will be read by qualified customers and prospects in the form you want. When you provide news and information that your target audience requests and wants to read – information that will enhance their knowledge and help them do their jobs – they'll be more likely to share your news with their colleagues and co-workers. That's what triggers the viral component of news releases in the online environment.

In just the past few years, the overall dynamics and the way news and information are shared have changed dramatically because of the Internet. In his latest book *World Wide Rave*, David

Meerman Scott, also author of *The New Rules of Marketing and PR*, writes, "Promote your organization and its products and services by delivering great online information tied directly to your products, services, and ideas (that's *tied to*, not *touting*). Success comes from the fact that people want to share this content with their friends, colleagues, and family members."

With vertical sites like ThomasNet News (http://news.thomasnet.com), the news release now reaches customers and prospects directly, bypassing the journalists. RSS feeds, e-newsletters and social media can easily spread your company's news to your target audiences. **Today, most readers of your news release are your target audience. The Internet has provided a channel that circumvents the mainstream media who were the "gatekeepers" of the past – determining what constituted the news and what they would publish to their readers.**

This is why news releases are such an important part of your online strategy. When prospective customers search for information, whether they're searching within ThomasNet News or through Google, Google News, Yahoo, Yahoo News, Topix.net, MSN or other search sites and news portals, your news release can appear prominently in search results if it includes keywords and phrases prospective customers often associate with your products and services.

When news releases are carefully written with relevant information – *including detailed product or service descriptions and keywords and phrases relevant to your target audience* – your news can be easily found and, most likely, read by prospective customers. By doing this, you're allowing your news releases to reach prospects beyond just those that come to your site—and it also allows your news releases to "live" and remain searchable on the Internet far beyond their publishing date.

In the American Express OPEN Forum, Barbara Krause writes,

> **"Today your release needs to be optimized for the web... Over 80% of online purchases start with a web search (Forrester Research), and online search is the number one source for journalists to obtain additional story information (Bennett & Company). Using search engine optimization (SEO), you can help ensure your news release is easily found by customers, reporters and the robots that crawl the web to deliver search results."**

How to 'optimize' your news releases for better results

To optimize your news release, Krause advises:
1. Identify the search terms that will lead customers and reporters to you. Include these phrases (usually two- to four-words long) in your news release.

2. Use key words in the headline and body of your news release – preferably in the first 63 characters of your headline.

3. Hyperlink key words and phrases to your company's website ("but don't overdo it").

4. Use multimedia and link to a YouTube video or Flash demonstration of your product.

Your news releases should also be posted at your website

Often, news releases are the only content that is added from month to month, so be sure to include your news releases on your website. These keyword-rich documents will also help your site to be found on search engines – part of a good search engine optimization (SEO) strategy.

Include a live link to your company's website on all of your news releases

This way, when other search engines pick up your releases, readers can click directly to your site. When applicable, use both a link to your homepage, as well as a link to the page on your site that talks about the product or service in your news. This is called a 'deep link,' because it takes a reader directly to the page of interest.

People want to know the information in your news releases

Journalists, customers and prospects view new product and service information as vital content. That is why new product/service news sections of industry websites and trade magazines are among the most highly read and requested information.

People rely on new product news for:

- Ideas on design, development, and manufacturing
- Support of sourcing and procurement choices
- Staying abreast of market changes
- Keeping tabs on what their competitors are doing

According to the ThomasNet Industrial Purchasing Barometer (IPB) survey users shared the importance of this information in performing their jobs:

- **77%** of industrial buyers say product news is important to them in their job

- **70%** of buyers look online for new industrial product news

- **73%** of buyers would like an easy way to have new industrial product news delivered right to their inbox.

Journalists specifically look for well-written product news releases to meet reader demand and generate product news stories in their publications. This is why product and service news releases should be an important part of your marketing and communications mix.

#1

Plan to write your news release

It is important to create a plan for what you want your news release to accomplish. Take a look at the "Who?... What?... etc." list on page 2, then think about answering some of these questions:

- What is it that you want to communicate? What is your news and why is it important to a journalist?

- What makes this product or service interesting to the market?

- What problem does it solve and/or what solution does it provide?

- What features of the new product or service will have an impact on the market? What improvements are significant to the industry you serve?

- Who is your preferred audience?

- What do you want readers to take away from your release?

- What are the descriptive words or key phrases used by your customers when searching for your type of product or service?

- What do you want to accomplish with your release: increase business, disseminate information, or both? Does the release's lead (opening) address or answer the basic tenets of journalism (previously reviewed on page 2):

  - Who?
  - What?
  - When?
  - Where?
  - Why?
  - How?

Once you have a plan, it is time to write the news release.

Write Your News Release

The important key to writing a news release is keeping it concise and to the point. Keep in mind that editors and journalists constantly receive releases. A tight, well-written release will help an editor understand quickly why your news is important to their readers. Make sure your release does not read like a sales pitch. This will often send up a red flag in an editor's mind to be skeptical of the release.

1. **Start with a headline**

   The first item on a news release that a reader will see is the headline. It is important to write a headline that will grab the attention of the reader. The headline should sum up the entire story. It should be concise and descriptive so the reader wants to read more. If the release is on a new feature, or an update to an existing product, state that information in the headline or sub-headline.

2. **Summarize with a sub-headline**

   The sub-headline completes the thought started by the headline. Use the important keywords that your customers and prospects would use to describe this product or service and ***briefly*** summarize your news.

3. **Write a good lead paragraph**

   After the headline, the first paragraph of the news release is the most important. Following "Journalism 101" principles (stated on page 2), the first one or two paragraphs should answer the following questions:

   - Who?
   - What?
   - Where?
   - When?
   - Why?
   - How?

   In some cases, it may take two paragraphs to accomplish this, but never more.

4. **Continue your news release with important information and details**

   - **After the lead, the rest of the news release should support the first paragraph(s).** Keep in mind, a journalist wants to be ***informed***, not "sold." Be factual

and honest with your statements about the product or service. Your news release should provide supporting information to substantiate any claim made. You should <u>avoid</u> any marketing "hype." This can be put in the boilerplate paragraph(s) at the end of the release.

- **Avoid unsubstantiated claims in your release.** A journalist judges the credibility of a release based on the back-up information provided with each claim. It is also important that a release supply the answers to potential questions about your product.

- **Keep the writing style dynamic and to the point.** It is important to immediately engage the busy reader of the news release, even if the release is about an "industrial staple." If you are not excited about your product, you cannot expect a journalist or reader to be excited.

- **Your news release should be one or two pages.** Most stories about new products tend to be one or two paragraphs in most trade magazines. A release longer than two pages will most likely not be read to the end. Again, we can't stress enough that your news release needs to be concise and to the point.

- **Avoid the temptation to use industry terminology and jargon.** Write in a conversational style. You will find a large number of journalists do not have the same technical background as you might have, even if they write for a trade magazine. Still, be sure to use keywords and key phrases commonly used by your customers in the news release. If appropriate, include them in the headline and first paragraph of your release. By "optimizing" your releases with these keywords, you'll make it easier for qualified prospects to find your news through the major search engines, and through industrial sites like ThomasNet.com.

- **Describe your product, remembering: <u>Feature - Function - Benefit</u>.** What it is, what it does and the benefit to the user. This will help the journalist communicate to their readers why they should consider your products. It is important that you provide specific and detailed information.

- **When appropriate, add quotes from "early adopters" of your products showing how they have benefited from them already.** This will help substantiate the importance of your announcement.

- **Conclude your news release with important contact information and a boilerplate paragraph(s).** The contact information should be specifically related to the product or service you're announcing. The company information -- or boilerplate paragraph(s) -- should describe your business and the industries you serve. In addition, you need to provide the name of an individual that 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 accessible on the day that you distribute the release). Include the contact phone number, fax, Email address, Web address and mail address. You can also issue your release on company letterhead to give it a professional appearance.

5. Provide supporting documentation

The following items should be included in the news release packet, whenever available:

- Pictures and images – all pictures and images that can help the journalists and readers visualize your product. A standard specification for electronic images is 300 dots per inch.
- Specifications sheets / product brochures – any specification sheets or promotional information that supports the information presented in your news release.

#3

Remember to Proofread

1. Lastly, have someone you trust **proofread** your work. Typos, spelling and grammatical errors will hurt your credibility with journalists. Be especially careful with contact information so that readers aren't misdirected.

2. By following the steps outlined in this guide, you can write more effective news releases as part of your company's marketing and communication efforts.

3. For additional assistance writing your news releases, see the example/outline of a news release on the following pages of this guide, refer to the resources below, or contact ThomasNet News at wng@thomasnet.com or 212-629-2113.

How to Write a Press Release, Planning Begins Before You Write – Michigan State University, http://www.msu.edu/course/aee/211/newswritinghowto.pdf

Packing a Punch with Press Releases – About.com, http://advertising.about.com/library/weekly/aa090302a.htm

The New PR: How to Write Effective Press Releases in the Age of Twitter – American Express OPEN Business Forum http://blogs.openforum.com/2009/06/12/the-new-pr-how-to-write-effective-press-releases-in-the-age-of-twitter/

Using press releases in search engine marketing, Pandia Search Central, http://www.pandia.com/features/pressrelease.html

(Your company logo)

For Immediate Release

Contact: (Name of Person)
Phone: ____-_____-_____
Email: _____@_____

Attention-Getting Headline
Sub-headline that finishes thought of headline and BRIEFLY summarizes your news

City, State — Release Date — This is the "LEAD" – the paragraph(s) that answers Who, What, Where, When Why and How. Provides concise answers to all the 5 W's and H. Be specific and clearly identify the subject of the release. Use popular customer keywords and phrases.

The rest of the news release supports the first paragraph. Offer details. This paragraph begins the factual back-up to any claims made in the news release. This can contain information on the capabilities of the product or service, the potential application and industries.

Always be factual and honest with your statements about the product or service. The document should provide supporting information to back up any claim made, but be sure to avoid marketing "hype." Avoid unsubstantiated claims. Provide credible back-up information with each claim.

Keep the writing style dynamic and to the point. Your release should be one or two pages. Be concise.

Avoid industry terminology and jargon. Write in a conversational style using conversational English.

When describing your product *(*Always hyperlink product or service directly to the page on your website that talks about it)* -- remember: Feature, Function & Benefit. What it is, what it does and how it benefits the user. This will help the journalist communicate to their readers why they should consider your products.

About (Your Company) – this is the "boilerplate paragraph" *Always hyperlink your company name to your website*

      The concluding content in a release is about your company and the important information as it relates to the product. This section, also called the "boilerplate," should describe your business and the industries you serve. You need to provide the name of an individual that the journalist can contact for more information. Include the contact phone number, fax, email address, Web address and mail address. You can also issue your release on company letterhead to give it a professional appearance.

<div align="center">###</div>

<div align="center">Center your end marks ("###").</div>

Below the end marks, you should include any legal jargon such as registered trademarks, patents and copyrights.

For more information, for general public: (Contact Name, if different from PR person on first page), (Phone Number), (Email Address)

For more information on your product: http://www.yourdomain.com/product