

Guidelines for Writing and Formatting Press Releases

A good press release meets the following guidelines:

The Message

- Keep it simple
- Write in the active voice.

Active voice: The company offers several products.

Passive voice: Several products are offered by the company.

- Use short, upbeat sentences written in everyday language. Short paragraphs are best.
- Write factually and objectively. Avoid adjectives.
- Tell how the information can help the reader, listener or viewer. Even though you're sending a press release to journalists, it's their audience you should keep in mind.
- Insert quotes from your company's CEO and other experts.
- Check for the proper spelling of individual and company names. Understand that you won't have the opportunity to double-check facts if a reporter decides to use your story. They will assume that what you've submitted is correct.
- Don't use initials or acronyms without indicating what they stand for in the first reference.
- Use capitalization accurately, yet sparingly.
- Avoid jargon.
- Tell the reader where they can go, what they can do, or who they can call for information.
- Edit your material tightly; look for ways to shorten phrases and sentences.

The Length

- Try to limit your news to one page. It should be no longer than two pages.
- A fact sheet and/or photo may be attached, if needed.
- If your release spills over to a second sheet, try to end the first page with a completed paragraph, or at least a completed sentence. Type "-more-" in the bottom center at the bottom of the first page so the reader knows to read on. At the top of the second page include a brief heading (flush left or right, but not centered) that includes the name of your organization, the date, page number and topic of the release (in case it is separated from the first page).
- Mark the end of your release with "####" or "end" (centered) to signal that no additional text follows.

Lead Time

- Since publication schedules vary, contact each media outlet to determine the best timing for sending your releases.
- In general, weekly or monthly magazines should receive your news several weeks in

advance.

- Send releases to daily newspapers at least one week in advance, if possible.

Standards

- Print the release on your company's letterhead (or with a top heading that includes your business name, address, phone and fax numbers).
- Type "News Release" at the top of the page so the journalist knows immediately what it is.
- Indicate whether the announcement is for immediate release or for release on a later date. For example, you can type: "For Immediate Release," "For Release on Month/Day/Year," or "For Release On or After Month/Day/Year."
- Include a contact name and phone number. The contact should be available to answer questions or provide further information if the reporter needs it. Call the reporter back promptly with a response to their inquiry.
- Provide a short headline that describes the content at a glance. Try to include your company name in the headline to build instant name recognition. For example, "Small Business Notes Introduces Industry Specific Business Start Up Advice" is a headline that immediately tells a journalist what the release is about.
- Type a dateline at the beginning of the lead paragraph. A dateline includes the location from which the news is being generated (city in all caps) and the date. For example, the first text line in your release might look this:

KAMUELA, Hawaii (June 1, 2004 -- Small Business Notes introduced industry ...

- Try to determine and use the date you expect the release to arrive on the journalist's desk. The news may be hot off the press, but if it carries last week's date, a journalist may assume it's yesterday's news and throw it away without reading it.

Format

- Type on only one side of a letter size piece of paper. Never print text on the back side of the paper.
- Double-space the text so it can be easily read.
- Indent all paragraphs.
- Leave at least one inch margins on all sides. This gives the reporter space for editing, and makes your text easier to scan.

Fact Sheet

- Include a brief fact sheet on products, events or other topics that have multiple details that would clutter a press release. For example, you might issue a press release announcing a new product and include a fact sheet that describes the product's features and benefits in detail.
- Limit the fact sheet to one page.
- Include only facts, no quotes.

- Fact sheets may be written in an outline format or use bulleted lists to present information.
- Include diagrams or graphics as appropriate to communicate facts about your product or event.

Photos and Photo Captions

- Photos are optional but may be included with staff appointments, new product releases or event announcements.
- Hire a professional photographer, if possible.
- Photos of people are more interesting when the people are in action, however simple head shots may be used for promotion or appointment announcements.
- For newspapers, the usual format is a 5x7 or 8x10 black and white photo. It is a good idea to ask the publications about preferred photo size.
- For magazines or newspapers that use color, you should also supply a reproduction-quality slide or indicate that color art is available upon request. (If a reporter calls and requests color art, ask when they need it and be certain to get it there.)
- Photo captions should be written in present tense and in the active voice.
- Photo captions should contain information on the who, what, where, when and why.
- People in photos should be identified (from left to right) and the action in the photo described.
- Captions, typed on paper, can be attached to photos with a paperclip or tape, as long as the photo is not damaged. The best method is to tape the caption to the bottom of the photo.

Information courtesy of the Small Business Administration..