



Middle East Region
Staff College
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Press Releases

Presented by
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A conventional “hard copy” press release is a brief document, generally one to three double-spaced type written pages, announcing news about your company, product, or service to media professionals.

While there is no “standard” format for press releases, there are certain pieces of information that are essential:

- The CONTACT INFORMATION: This should be a block at the beginning of your release in the following format:

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE or FOR RELEASE ON MM/DD/YYYY

CONTACT:

Contact’s Name

Company Name

Voice Phone Number

Fax Number

Email Address

Web Site URL

- The HEADLINE: The most important component of any press release is the headline. If it doesn’t grab the attention of the editor to whom you send the release, then the release will never get coverage. Rather than using a headline proclaiming the benefits of product or service, use a headline that proclaims its newsworthiness. The headline should be centered on the page and in an all-capital bold font in a size a little larger than the body font. Keep the font simple throughout the release – Arial, Times New Roman, or Verdana.
- The DATELINE: This begins the first paragraph of the release and tells the City, State, and Date of your release. It is followed by a hyphen, and then the text. This first paragraph is extremely important because it contains the five W’s – who, what, when, where, and why. Once the headline has caught the attention of the editor, the first 10 words of the dateline paragraph should keep his attention. Make sure the information is newsworthy and accurate, and don’t make a sales pitch.
- The BODY: The second paragraph should explain your information in detail – who cares, why you should care, etc. If possible, you should also include an accurate QUOTE from someone credible associated with your product, service, or event. Include their title or position in your organization, and make sure the quote relates to the information being disseminated in the release.
- The SUMMATION: The third paragraph is a brief summation of the release and includes information about why the product, service, or event is newsworthy.
- The SOURCE: This is a brief paragraph about your organization. Include information about why it was founded, how long it has been in existence, and about the products or services it provides. You may also include contact information that might be different from that provided in the opening block of the release.
- The END: It’s always necessary to let the editor know the release is ended, especially if it is to be faxed. The most common way is to place “ # # #” or “- 30 -” at the end of the release, on a line by

itself and centered on the page. If the release is more than one page, also place “- MORE -” at the end of each page.

Tips for Press Releases

- Always use organization letterhead if doing a conventional hard copy press release. If this is not feasible, at least include an organizational logo.
- Each block or paragraph should begin at the left margin. Do not indent paragraphs.
- News stories, as a rule, use short, simple sentences and simple words. Keep each paragraph brief and to the point. Long or rambling press releases will likely be ignored. The release should be no more than 300-500 words and no more than two pages.
- Keep it factual and newsworthy. The media generally doesn't accept sales pitches or overembellished information. However, they generally respond well to news about how a product or service is a solution to a business, consumer, or community problem.
- Define your target audience. Press releases sent to media outlets that don't have readership likely to be interested in your news will also be ignored. Determine which publications are most likely to reach an audience that would find your news relevant. Write with the reader's perspective in mind.
- Proofread your story, and have several other people who are competent in grammar, punctuation, and spelling do the same. One of the fastest ways to have a press release ignored, even if it's highly newsworthy, is to submit something that is grammatically incorrect or contains spelling errors. Don't rely 100% on a word processor's spell check program. It's not uncommon for information to contain words that are unique to your product, service, or event.
- Make sure your release is sent to the appropriate editor at the selected media outlets. For example, don't send an article about cooking to the sports editor. It will rarely get forwarded to the appropriate individual.
- Make sure your release is submitted in a timely manner. If you are announcing an upcoming event, give plenty of time for the release to arrive, be reviewed, and scheduled for publication before the event occurs. You should generally allow three weeks in advance of the event for the media outlet to receive your story. If the release has a specific release date, don't expect the media outlet to hold the release for longer than one week. If the release is an “after the fact” story (i.e., someone has won a prestigious award), submit your story as soon as possible after the event.
- In today's world, email is a very common way of sending press releases. There are, however, some special considerations if email is used:
 - Email releases are generally shorter than their printed counterparts. This is because many individuals don't change the default length of incoming email messages, and longer emails can be truncated. Use the “####” at the end so the reader knows that hasn't happened.
 - Some email programs don't accept certain types or sizes of attachments, or may not accept them at all. One alternative is to post them on a web site, and inform the person to whom you

are sending the email where they can be found. This could include photographs, bios, white papers, or other supporting documentation. If this is not an alternative, then a conventional hard copy release is the way to go.

- Some media professionals have limited internet access. Always include complete contact information in case it is necessary to contact you to have printed materials mailed.
 - Some media outlets that accept attachments also specify limits for them. For example, they may specify a maximum (or minimum) resolution and format for photographs. They may also specify that text documents be in specific formats, such as .txt or Microsoft Word .doc files. If you don't honor their specifications, your documentation probably won't be used.
 - Avoid the use of HTML tags, bold type, color text, or special fonts and formatting that don't necessarily transmit well across all computer platforms. Stick with your email client's default line length. It's more likely to be the same as everyone else's. Left-justify each line, including the headline and the end.
 - Place the contact information at the end rather than the beginning of an email release. Someone reading an email should be able to make a decision in the first screening of your email. Don't waste that space with contact information. The reader will scroll down for your contact information if he wants to follow up.
 - Use all upper case for the release information, but don't follow it with an all upper case headline. Lots of in-line capital letter are harder to read with most email clients.
 - As a rule, the format of an email press release should be the release information (in all caps), a blank line, the headline (in mixed upper and lower case), a blank line, the body, a blank line, the contact information, a blank line, and the end.
- The three main types of outlets for press releases or news articles are newspapers, monthly magazines, and broadcast media (radio and television). Newspapers generally like three week's notice prior to publishing a release or story. Monthly periodicals usually close content two months in advance of the issue date. Broadcast media can provide much faster coverage, especially if the announcement is very newsworthy. If you plan on soliciting broadcast media to cover your story, be aware that on-air or telephone interviews are common. Be prepared by designating someone as your organizations's spokesperson and have them prep by planning on how to answer pertinent questions. Also plan on how to respond to questions you may not wish to answer.
 - Don't expect your release to be published verbatim – they rarely are. Most editors will do more proofreading and make your release follow their accepted format. Sometimes they'll drop what they consider to be non-essential information, but rarely do they change the context or intention of the article. Accept the changes good-heartedly; most editors have been doing their jobs for a long time, and more importantly, are familiar with what their readers are likely to respond to.

Sample Press Release

Below is a sample press release (sent by email) that generated quite a buzz for its company several years ago. Notice that the release does not follow the usual rules of including the five W's up front. However, the headline is a unique twist on words and grabs the reader's interest quickly. Also notice that the formats noted above are not strictly adhered to. Remember, there is no "standard" format for press releases. Be creative (note the title of the contact person at the end), but be concise and accurate.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Noodle Bytes Man

DUXBURY, Mass. - April 28, 1997 (Xpress Press)- Two years ago, Raymond Lemire was at one of those proverbial crossroads in life. Having been the victim of downsizing after a corporate merger, he faced the decision of whether to continue working for someone else or to start his own business.

Armed with statistics on growing pasta consumption, articles on the explosive growth of the internet and a second mortgage on his house, Lemire started the Flying Noodle and its Pasta of The Month Club.

His goal was to build a semi-virtual company. He would handle all the marketing, accounting and order taking from his home-based office, while the order fulfillment and warehousing would be outsourced. This would allow him to maximize time with customers and minimize his up front capital risk and ongoing overhead expenses.

His internet site is fast loading with whimsical noodle characters, a section on the history and lore of pasta and pasta sauces, recipes, a contest for newsletter subscribers and over 60 different pastas and 35 different pasta sauces. Customers can order via a state-of-the-art secure shopping basket system.

The internet site opened in December 1995 to the thunderous sound of emptiness. In the world of the internet, if you build it they will only come if you tell them you exist. Fortunately he also produced a direct mail brochure as insurance against his "sure bet" on the internet. This bought him the necessary time to really promote the site.

Now, a year and a half later, the Flying Noodle's internet site brings in 30% of the company's revenues. Lemire has added a Japanese language section to his web-site and has a growing base of customers. Over 40% of the company's revenues come from repeat business and customer referrals. About 10% of his business comes from overseas customers.

His advice to anyone who is thinking of starting an online business? Don't get carried away with the hype and forget about the basics of selling. Study the direct marketing field in terms of catalog structure, language, delivery systems, guarantees and style. Make your site as interactive as possible without ignoring the most important aspect of your site - it needs to be profitable in order to survive.

And the Flying Noodle? Is it surviving? "Business is five times ahead of 1996", says Lemire. "If we continue at this pace, 1997 will be a very good year for pasta."

You can check them out at <http://www.flyingnoodle.com> or call for their free brochure 1-800-566-0599.

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<http://www.flyingnoodle.com>

Flying Noodle

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Sources of information

<http://www.xpresspress.com/PRnotes.html>

<http://www.marketingsource.com/pressrelease/releaseformat.html>

<http://www.marketingsource.com/pressrelease/writingtips.html>

<http://www.constructionexecutives.com/industrynews/Detailed/183.shtml>