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## HOW TO WRITE A PRESS RELEASE

Something special is happening and you want to tell everyone. How do you get the word out? For the past century, businesses in America have used the press release to share their good news with targeted external audiences. Though technology has changed astoundingly since the first release was distributed in 1906, the press release remains the fundamental and essential tool for businesses to share organizational news.

The development and distribution of the press release is the first step in establishing a relationship between your company and the media and journalists covering your industry or market. Your goal is not just to make a good first impression, but also to make an everlasting impression. You want to engage the media and capture their interest with exciting and captivating company news. In pursuit of this goal, we can begin to make some determination as to what company news is press release worthy.

### The Press Release “Threshold”

An important point to remember is that developments at your company that are exciting to you and your colleagues are not necessarily viewed

the same way by outsiders and, in particular, the media. It is important to have or establish a press release “threshold” to determine the types of news you consider interesting enough to be distributed via press release to external audiences. An important consideration is impact. Does this news have far-reaching impact on your customers, investors, industry and employees? Examples of newsworthy items include announcements about: a new technology that has a positive impact on the environment, a new drug that helps to relieve arthritis, or a new manufacturing contract that will generate more business and allow your company to add 50 new full-time jobs.

## Elements of a Press Release

Once you have established your threshold and have exciting news to announce, it’s time to write your press release. There are several different approaches to writing a press release. However, certain elements are common to most releases. Those elements include the press release masthead, dateline, title/headline, subtitle, lead paragraph, quotes, body, call-to-action, organizational boilerplate and official closing. Let’s take a closer look at each of these elements.

- The **masthead** of your press release contains the company logo and contact information, as well as an indication of the timing of

the release. In terms of timing, a press release is either intended "For Immediate Release" or is "Embargoed" for a later date/time. Your contact information should include as much information as possible. At a minimum, include your name, email address, and office and cell phone numbers.

- The **dateline** includes the date of the press release and the name of the city where the news takes place.
- The goal of the press release **title or headline** is to intrigue and captivate the reader (typically an editor or reporter). It should summarize generally what the release is about. Whenever possible you should include your keywords for search engine optimization (SEO) purposes. The headline should be short and descriptive. Refrain from using jargon in the headline, and stay away from hyperbole.
- **Subtitles** are optional on some press releases. However, they are a great tool for adding content to bolster the press release title. In general, you should offer the reader additional caveats that are not obvious from the title. Subtitles should reinforce and complement the title but not overpower it. For instance, if the title names a new

product or procedure, the subtitle can describe the expected impact or benefit to customers.

- The **lead paragraph**, in two or three concisely written sentences, should give the reader a glimpse of what is about to follow. Don't merely provide the details (who, what, when, where, why and how) – begin to paint a picture for the reader. In many ways, the lead paragraph is the key to the success of your press release. Use active voice, and focus on impact and how this news improves the lives of your customers. Don't bury the lead! Remember to keep the bottom line up front (BLUF) and give the reader the most essential information in the lead paragraph. Your lead paragraph should also be consistent with the title.
- The **quotes** you choose to include in your press release should stand out and reinforce all of the positive aspects of the subject matter of the press release. They should also, whenever possible, reinforce a company value, or an aspect of its mission or vision. Ideally, you want the speakers to use language that demonstrates your organization's competitive advantage, expertise and/or industry leadership. Your quotes should never state the obvious or

insult the reader's intelligence.

- The **body** of your press release should go beyond merely announcing a new product, technology breakthrough or a record return on investment. It should make those announcements within the context of a narrative that supports the strategic goals of the company. Storytelling is a successful and popular approach to writing press releases that will evoke a response from the reader. Don't editorialize or make spectacular claims in your storytelling. Stick to the facts.
- Your press release should include a **call-to-action** element directing the reader to relevant information beyond what is in the press release. Most releases will include hyperlinks to the company or product website, while others may simply invite the reader to become a part of their social networks.
- Most companies have a standard **boilerplate**. This is a short description of the company that is placed at the end of each press release you issue, typically under the heading "About XYZ Company." Make sure yours is updated and grammatically and factually accurate.

- Use ### or -30- at the bottom of your press release to let the reader know nothing else follows. This is the **official closing** of your release.

In a perfect world, your press release will include all of these elements and would fit neatly on one page. The industry standard is the one-page press release, though the two-page release has become increasingly popular. Confining the text to one page forces the writer to be more concise and improves the final product.

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