

# How to write a press release



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# Guide to getting your business into print with a press release

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A press release can be a great way of getting your business in the local paper without spending a penny.

But there are certain rules you should be following to optimise your chances of your words making it into print.



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Journalists are often very busy and get bombarded with information – having to wade through dozens of irrelevant press releases which land in their inbox.

Often they will make a decision on whether the material is relevant and worthy of further investigation based just on the subject line.

In that respect you have your work cut out to ensure you can grab their attention enough to make them read on, but the good news is that many newspapers and magazines rely heavily on user-generated content - stories submitted to them by readers or press releases.

This means that as long as your content is relevant, they are likely to use it as long as you don't give them an excuse not to.

If the journalist needs to do a lot of work, such as calling you for more information or completely rewriting what you have sent in, it is going to have to be really, really good story for it to be worth their while.

On the other hand, if it's all there, neatly wrapped up in a bow, and the journalist can just copy and paste it onto a page, your chances of making it into print are extremely high.

So, it's worth your effort to get it right.

Follow these easy steps to create a press release that will make it into print.

## 1. Do your research

Read the publication(s) you plan to target with your press releases to get an idea of the length of their articles, their writing style and depth of detail, as well as the sort of stories they tend to include.

## 2. Is it news?

Make sure your press release is actually “newsworthy”.

You have to ask yourself, would most people really care about your “news”? If it’s just a new product line or service, the chances are the answer is probably ‘no’. Celebrating one year in business isn’t news - wait until it’s 20 year, or 50! Finding a human interest angle to your business is most likely to gain you a few column inches.

## 3. Answer the questions

One of the first things journalists learn about writing a story is answering the five Ws – who, what, where, why and when?

Your press release must include details of who is involved, what has happened, where it happened, why it happened and when? If you write out the answers to these questions before you start, you have the basis for your press release, which you can then start constructing into some kind of order.

## 4. First thing’s first!

The key to a successful press release is getting the introduction right.

Your first paragraph needs to sum up the most important aspects of your story in just 15 to 20 words.

To help you, consider how you would ‘open’ your story if you were telling it to someone in the pub or to Auntie Beryl.

Or imagine a TV newsreader reporting your story – how would they introduce it? Many journalists will base their decision on whether they are interested in a story just by reading the intro, so it’s worth putting some effort into getting it right.

## 5. Go with the flow

After the introduction, the rest of your ‘story’ should flow. Make sure you include all the key facts and make it relevant to the publication you are targeting and its audience. Where possible, include quotes from relevant people, which bring your story to life. Use full names and make sure they are spelled correctly. Use short punchy sentences that are easy to read and understand.

Try to visualise your story as an inverted triangle - your intro gives a broad overview of the story and then you go into more detail.

You can also use WHAT? to help you structure your story:

**What** happened? - This is your intro and is a very broad description summing up the most important aspects of your story.

**How?** - Start to drill down into the details, answering the five Ws - who, what, where, when and why?

**Attribute** - Make it clear where the information has come from. Include quotes.

**Tie-up** - This is the last paragraph or two and ties everything together. It’s the place to include your call to action if you want people to call you, visit your shop or your website.

## **6. Size matters**

Base the length of your press release on the publication you are targeting – most likely a length of 300 to 400 words.

Less is definitely more in most cases. If your press release runs to four pages of A4 very few - if any - journalist will have the patience to wade through it to find the relevant stuff, let alone take the time to pare it down so it's suitable for publication. On the other hand if your press release is short and sweet they are more likely to drop it in when they have a small space.

## **7. Make it easy**

Use sub-headings and bullet points where appropriate to make your press release easier to read and understand.

## **8. Get the picture**

Include a good quality photo with your press release if appropriate – after all, a picture can speak a thousand words. Make sure you have the relevant rights or permissions to use the photo.

## **9. Fill them in**

Use a “boilerplate” or Notes to Editor section at the end of your press release to include any other relevant information, such as the background of your business.

## **10. Any questions?**

Make sure you include your contact details in case the journalist has questions or requires further information. A mobile phone number is always a good idea and an email address.

## **11. Grab their attention**

These days, email is the best way to send a press release.

Give some thought to your subject line – it needs to catch the attention of a busy journalist.

Don't include your press release as an attachment if possible. Just copy and paste your words into the body of your email. This gets round the possible issue of the recipient not having suitable software to open your attachment.

## **12. It pays to check**

Last, but definitely not least, make sure you spell check and proof read your press release before hitting 'send'. Poor grammar can be a real turn off for journalists.