

Section I: Writing for the Media:

The traditional Press Release

A press release is a standardized format for initiating contact with the media. The format has been around for over a century and traditional media still follows it.

Key points:

1. Use your company / organization letterhead where applicable.
2. Depending upon how big the publication is, your press release will go to the editor, section editor or reporter relevant to your story. Get to know your local media or your trade publications. Write down who / which editor is responsible for the type of stories you will be sending them. Some publications make it easy on you and tell you in their publications where to send press releases to. Others you have to do a little digging with an email or call to see who the right person is for your news release. News Release and Press Release are the same thing. Make a list of the publications, TV and radio stations that are applicable to you be they local, national or international, who the relevant editors are and how best to deliver them press releases.
3. Editors get a lot of press releases a day and yours will be one of them. Your first job is to sell it to the editor. Put yourself in his shoes and see if your press release would be of interest to him.
4. Keep it short. Your press release should ideally be one or two pages but not longer than that. Their time is precious and they are almost always up against a deadline.

5. Why do editors accept and print press releases in the first place? They are trying to sell their publication / air time to their audience and they want to show the people that they print / air information that is current, relevant, interesting and news worthy. That keeps the readers / viewers loyal and they keep renewing their subscriptions.
6. Do not include unsubstantiated claims in your press release. Be factual and honest and avoid hype.
7. Describe your product just like a good simple presentation would, i.e., feature - function - benefit. What's the feature, what does it do and how does it help.
8. Most editors are always on a deadline. If you make his job easy, you have a better chance of getting some ink. If the editor can at a glance get the gist of your story, he may pursue it further. If it is in the right format, he does not have to struggle with it. He has space to fill and you just provided him good content. What's not to like.
9. A story sells better especially if it is a human interest story. Scandals and controversies also get better coverage. That does not mean that your new internal combustion engine cannot get press coverage but if you can find a human interest angle in addition to your new light weight but hardy sprockets, you have a better chance of getting published.
10. Provide pictures as attachments if emailing and on DVD if sending via the postal service. Don't send your press release as an attachment if emailing. Send it in the body - just attach pictures and other related documents if you feel they may be needed. You can also send videos especially if the video is nicely produced. Online channels don't mind using videos as it saves them a lot of hassle. If there is a photo shoot opportunity, let the editors know that if they want to

take pictures or make a video, they can expect a video shoot opportunity at a specific time and they can coordinate with you.

11. Proofread your press release or better yet, let somebody else proofread it.
12. If you can somehow involve a local celebrity also, you will really improve the chances of the media showing up with cameras and camcorders.
13. Follow up with a phone call. Most likely you will get voice mail and that is fine. Just leave a short message with your name and phone # like ' This is John with ABC engineering. I sent you a press release about our new hybrid engine. Just checking to see if you got it and if you need any additional information. My telephone # is 123-555-1212.

Remember, you are providing them content, that is, you are helping them do their job. So don't be shy.
