

Debbie Leven

21 ways to make your press release stand out



“Connect with them [the journalists] on social networks and follow what they chat about and the stories they share. It’s an easy way to get on their radar in advance of sending a press release. You can’t do it with every contact but you can do it for the key ones, and, it makes sense, doesn’t it?”

Do press releases still have a role? Yes, they do. But, with journalists being inundated with them as well as being bombarded on social media you have to work that much harder to get your press releases noticed. So, here are some helpful tips.

1. Make sure it has news value

If you’ve identified a news story then you’ve done some of the hard work already. What I mean is that it’s easy to issue a press release but the starting point has to be to pinpoint the news value in your story that will interest journalists. A new website in itself is not a news story – you have to dig much deeper into the impact the website will have on people. Always ask yourself the question – where’s the human interest? And, then, think about the journalists you want to target and how the story is **relevant to them and their audiences**.

2. Make it timely

Old news isn’t news at all. Mostly, news is about something that has just happened, or is about to happen. If you fall flat with your news story and don’t get any interest then don’t be tempted to re-issue it the following week. If it didn’t get any coverage then there’s probably a very good reason and you’ll need to do a bit of detective work to find out what happened.

3. Connect on social media in advance

You may well have a long list of potential media outlets to target.

Ideally, you’ll have a list of those that are priority. Don’t use a **press release distribution service** where you never get the chance to connect with journalists or build a working relationship with them. Take your priority targets and get to know them in advance of sending a press release.

Connect with them on social networks and follow what they chat about and the stories they share. It’s an easy way to get on their radar in advance of sending a press release.

You can’t do it with every contact but you can do it for the key ones, and, it makes sense, doesn’t it? If they know your name before you email them, then they’re more likely to open your email. That doesn’t mean that your story will get picked up and covered automatically. And, you still have to have a news story that is interesting and relevant. But, it does help to get your foot in the door.

4. Phone in advance

Nothing beats getting on the phone to make contact and to get first hand feedback on whether a story is of interest. Giving a journalists the ‘heads up’ on a story helps them to plan the stories they are going to cover and that makes their job a whole lot easier.

5. Tailor your approach

Once you have found your news story it’s easy to slip into ‘spray and pray’ by sending out your press release to as many contacts as possible. The key is to get inside the head of the journalists you are targeting and to

tailor your news story. Journalists who work on local newspapers, business websites, and special interest publications will all come at the story from a different perspective.

So, if you want your press release to stand out then you need to make it as easy as possible for them to use your story. One way to do that is to tailor your press release to their interests. For example, for a local newspaper that means putting the local angle in the title and the first paragraph; for a parenting website that means thinking from the readers’ perspective and ensuring the news is tailored for parents.

6. Tweak for the channel

Websites, publications, radio, television – they all want different things from a news story. It’s a good idea to think about that in advance so that you can tweak your email pitch to suit them. Don’t say ‘photos on request’ if you’re sending to a radio show. That will just make you look stupid.

7. Don’t get carried away with embargo

It’s unlikely you’ll need to use the term ‘embargo’ at the top of your press release. ‘Embargo’ simply means that you are giving information about a news story but requesting that it is not published or broadcast before a specified date and time.

Embargoes are useful for stories where journalists need time to carry out some research, read reports or do interviews to put a ‘package’ together. Don’t assume your story

needs an embargo unless you have a very good reason. Otherwise, you could really annoy your press and media contacts.

8. Attention grabbing headline

You should use your headline in the subject line of your email when pitching a journalist. As it's the first thing they see, and influences whether they open your email, it needs to grab their attention. So, you need to make it obvious that it is relevant for their readers/listeners/viewers. Don't try and be clever with your title or over think it.

9. Answer the key questions

A press release needs to answer the key questions: who, what, why, when, where and how? A good way to plan out your press release is to use the inverted pyramid format – with the most important information up top and then further and supporting information lower down. The test of your news value and whether you have captured the essence of the story lies in using a simple test – that is to take the first paragraph and to see if it could stand alone in explaining your story. Editors edit from the bottom of a press release upwards – so if they only have room for one paragraph then you need to be satisfied that the first paragraph in your press release would do the job in telling your story as a stand-alone piece.

For more help on putting together a press release, have a look at [press release template](#) and [press release checklist](#).

10. Keep it short and punchy

There's a huge temptation to put in as much detail as possible into a press release so that you answer every possible question the journalist might have. That defeats the objective. The aim of the press release is to give the story in a short and concise way and to make it easy for the journalist to contact you for more information.

You give the key facts but you do not need in depth detail. A one page press release is what you should aim for. If it creeps over to two then edit it down as far as possible but two pages should be the absolute maximum.

You need to make your press release easy to read too. One way to do that

is to keep to short sentences and to stick to the facts – make your copy punchy and to the point. So, get your points across. Make your copy stand out. Keep their attention.

11. Include quotes

Quotes are a great way to make your news story interesting. A quote from someone in your organisation is great. But, a quote from a third party is even more interesting. But, remember that this is not sales puff and that the quote needs to be relevant to the audience rather than just an opportunity to plug your business.

12. Kill the jargon

In any industry, it's easy to slip into jargon. Never make any assumptions about what your audience will understand. Even with specialist publications and websites, where you might think that readers will know the terminology, you have to be careful. You want to get people interested in you and your business - not turn them off. And, you should be aiming for a press release that the journalist finds easy to use – not one littered with language that they will need to re-write.

13. Make yourself available and accessible

Don't forget to include your contact details, including how available and accessible you are outside of normal office hours.

Bear in mind that if you want coverage and for journalists to seek you out then you need to ensure you are available when they want to speak to you.

14. Leave the detail for 'notes to editors'

It's inevitable that you might need to explain some elements of your news story or provide a bit of background information. That information does not sit in the main body of the press release but in a section after the press release ends, called 'Note to Editors'.

You only want to include information that is necessary to help explain or give the context for the news story.

It's a good way to ensure the journalist is informed without clogging up the main body of the press release.

15. Get fresh eyeballs

Even if you are in a rush to get your press release out there you need to

give yourself a bit of time to ensure you've got it right. Leave it, even if it's just for a few minutes, so that you can come back to it with fresh eyes. Ideally, you'd write it and then come back to it the next day to review it.

16. Double-check your facts and spellings

Check and double check your content. Once you put your information out there you can't pull it back. So, be 100% sure you have got the right statistics and that you have quoted the right source. Ensure spellings of names, places and organisations are all correct. The journalists is putting their faith in you as someone who is providing accurate information and you should want to be building your reputation based on that.

17. Do not send attachments

Don't be tempted when sending in your news story by email to a journalist, to send the press release or any photos as attachments. It's best to paste the press release copy into the body of the email and to send on photos once they have been requested by the journalist.

18. Re-write for your website

You could put your press release on your website but it makes much more sense to explain the news story in a way that is better suited to your website visitors.

Press releases are written in a style and following format guidelines specific to the needs of the journalist. It's unlikely that your website visitors will want the information presented to them in that way.

19. Test it out

Sometimes you can be too close to a story to know whether what you have written in your press release really gets the news across. So, it's a good idea to test out your press release with someone who doesn't know the story. Read it to them and see whether they understand it.

20. Is this the best way to get my news across?

For many people the press release is still seen as the default option for getting a news story into the public domain. The press release is a great tool but you've got to use it in the right way for the right reason. And, importantly, it's got to be right for the

audiences you are targeting. Increasingly, businesses and organisations are turning to social media to make their news announcements and to comment on news events. If that's where your audience is then you need to use that channel.

21. Follow up in the right way

Don't call a journalist just to ask if they got the press release – that will just annoy them. And, don't follow up when you know they are on a deadline – I think you can imagine the response you'll get if you do that.

Follow up with journalists by offering them something more that helps them to use your story – it's as simple as that.

In a nutshell: If you want your press release to stand out then you need to keep the audience for your news story in mind. Focus on human interest and make it as easy as possible for journalists to use your story.

What's the next press release you've got planned and what other tips would you add for ways to make your press release stand out?

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About the Author

Debbie Leven is an award winning Public Relations consultant. She has worked in Public Relations for more than twenty years and helps service based businesses and entrepreneurs get their message across and get more visibility on and offline via the media and guest blogging. She hit the Number 1 spot on Amazon for her book: 99 Public Relations Tips for Small Businesses. She's been featured on The Huffington Post, Marketing Donut, Business Zone and 12 Most. She has just launched a Guest Blogger Matchmaker service – to save clients time and hassle in finding the right guest blogging opportunities for their business.

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