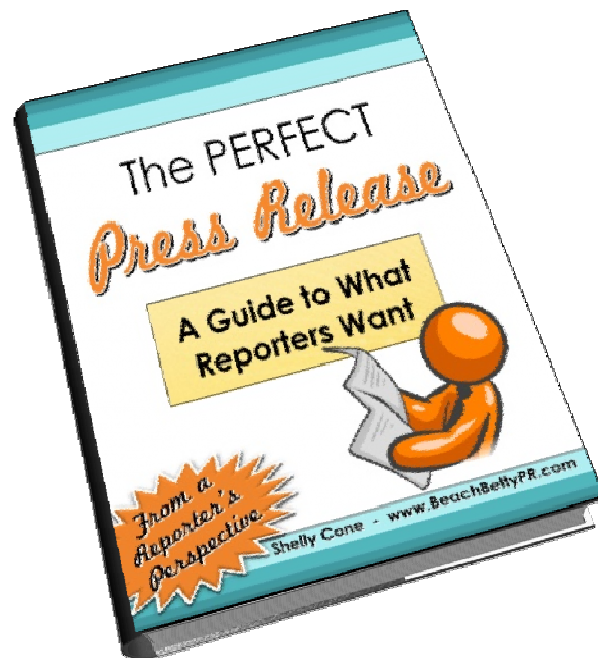


The Perfect Press Release

A Guide to What Reporters Want



By Shelly Cone

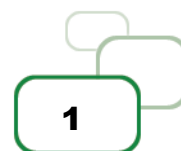


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Getting Publicity

Getting your business started was probably pretty easy. Of course it was chaotic and at times stressful and there was probably a learning curve but you had passion on your side, you had excitement at all the possibilities your future business would hold. Then came time for the marketing end of it. Trying to get media attention seems like a daunting task and raises lots of questions. Who to submit the information to? How do you even write a press release in the first place?

My name is Shelly Cone and I've been a print journalist for nearly 17 years. In that time I've received thousands of press releases and been the one to decide what gets printed and what gets chucked into the recycle bin. I'm sincere when I say that a good majority of press releases and press kits get tossed, passed on to another reporter who then tosses it, or simply forgotten.

Sometimes it's for good reason—the press release wasn't newsworthy, was missing vital information or was out of our coverage area. Sometimes the announcement was newsworthy but the press release was so poorly written it failed to get the message across. I'm not just talking about press releases from individuals, I'm also talking about press releases from seasoned public relations professionals, who've never been on my side of the news desk.

This ebook will walk you through some of the basics from a reporter's standpoint. What makes reporters react, what we like to see in a press release and how to get on our good side.

Hopefully by the end of the ebook you will feel confident in pitching your story to the media. And with any luck you'll be seeing yourself in the news!



What Makes a Good News Story?

What the news media considers a good news story is widely subjective. In fact, there's sometimes even differences between what reporters think is a good news story and what editors consider a good news story.

But for the most part there are three main elements reporters look for in a good news story:

- **Timeliness**

Basically, why are you pitching this idea now? Is there a time element that makes this story important? Things like a tie in to Back to School days or Christmas or summer or basically anything that has a time element.

- **Relevance**

Can people relate? Does it affect a large group of people? In other words, why should people care? If you are part of a team of engineers working on a robot that cleans your house efficiently and is affordable for most families, I think a lot of people would want to know.

- **Uniqueness**

Is this an issue that is not only significant but not covered to death? Is it a new trend or how about just something not a lot of people know about. The cleaning robot could probably fit into this category too.

What Kinds of Press Releases Make Reporters React?

Even meeting all the elements for a good story, sometimes reporters simply don't act on a press release. There are several reasons for this. Some of them surprising. Usually it's because it lacks some or all of the following elements. In order to get a reporter to react to your press release it should be the following:

- Complete

All of the elements are there, any questions are answered, contact info, pictures, details. You'd be surprised at how often people leave out the details. If there is no contact information and a reporter has a question, there's no way to proceed. So make sure at the very least you provide contact info. It also helps to make sure you cover Who, What, Where, When, Why. If it makes it easier for you go ahead and list each of those words and add the information next to it.

- Timely

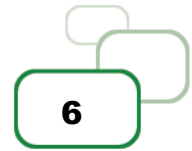
Again, something that can be tied to an issue or event that's happening or about to happen. For instance "Back to School" "Holidays" "governmental action" like passing a bill or an election. Does it fit in with their deadline? If it's too close to the event for them to meet their deadline they will toss it.

- Local Angle

Smaller media prefers this. Generally they want a local tie, like the event is happening in their coverage area, or if not, then a resident from their coverage area is involved. But there usually needs to be something that ties in the local coverage area.

- Wide appeal or affectation

Larger media want to see that this is something that will affect a lot of people. Since large media covers a greater readership or viewership they want stories that will appeal



to many people. If they do a story on something that affects a limited group of people, like something happening in a specific town, then that story would have to be really unique enough that people who aren't affected would actually take an interest in it.

Think of it this way. What do you like to hear about? Would a piece about a store 300 miles away, that you will never step foot into, interest you? Probably not. Would it interest you if that store sold an extremely unique product that no one has ever sold before? Maybe so.

- Preferably a new angle

If you can come up with a new way to approach an old story you may get the reporter's attention that way as well. I remember when I was a government reporter and the city was opening a new bike trail. They were holding a ribbon cutting. This is something I ordinarily wouldn't do more than just a news brief on, but the press release got my attention. The ribbon cutting wasn't just a ribbon cutting. They were doing a "bike race" in which several members of the city government, including some city councilmembers would be riding their bikes and racing to the finish. So I wrote a short story.

How to Get Many Different Angles From Your Story

If you are promoting your business you are basically looking for publicity for your product or services. Sure that's one angle but frankly not an interesting one in and of itself.

Instead of just touting your business and telling people "I'm here," find a reason that compels people to be interested in you. When you start looking at other ways to get people interested in your product or service you'll see that it isn't hard to find several different angles.

- Think beyond your product or service. Define "What problem does your product or service solve?" That can be one story.
- Does your product relate to a trend? More teens are texting while driving. Your product turns off their phone while driving. Now you've got a trend-driven story.
- Can you or your product add to a larger story?
Increasingly families are facing foreclosure. You are a therapist. Can you add perspective on how this is affecting children or the family dynamic? You may not get a story based solely on your services but you may get a call asking for comment as part of a bigger story on foreclosures.

The most important thing though would be to think beyond your product or service. Think outside of the box. And see how your product fits in.

- Jump on the bandwagon. In respect to trends when you see a hot topic or issue, see if you can jump on the bandwagon. Find a way for your product to relate.

The Perfect Press Release



So how do you apply this to your press release?

Let's take a sample business. Say you are a personal trainer and you also do group classes during the summer. The first thing you want to do is talk to your local media about announcing your opening.

But since you also do group classes you may want to create a “group weight loss challenge,” class and tie it in with a story on fighting obesity rates. So angle #2 would be how your business is fighting obesity rates in your town.

Maybe you've just released an exercise video—that would be pitch #3.

Offering fitness classes for free to elementary students? There's your pitch #4.

There's really no limit.

How to Find the Right Angle to Pitch

OK so you've discovered a variety of ways you can be considered newsworthy. What's the best approach to go with? Sometimes it will be obvious, if there is timeliness involved or a hot trend you want to connect to, then go with that option because it's fleeting. The other options you'll have to weigh out to see which makes the best sense for the message you want to get across.

Some of your decision will depend on the media to which you are going to be pitching your story. Not every media source wants the same thing.

- Local media

Like I said earlier, will always want a local tie in. Your tie will be the fact you reside in or are located in their coverage area, service people in that area, or have an effect on people in that area.

- Medium sized media

Medium sized media sources are looking for whether your pitch is timely. And whether it affects a wider audience, not just your local area.

- Large media outlets

Are looking for trend stories or stories significant enough to affect a large amount of people. It's likely you'll be a mention in part of a bigger story so figure out how you fit into the bigger picture. For instance, if you own a lawn maintenance company and you are the best around. That probably won't be enough for a story. But since you've picked up business because of the amount of foreclosures and abandoned homes that need lawn upkeep, there may be a story about how the increase in foreclosures has banks hiring companies to maintain those empty homes. And you'd be one of the sources for that story.

How to Get Story Ideas from the News

If you are stumped for ideas or just looking for something new to pitch, watch the news, scour newspapers, there are ideas in other news stories. The thing to remember is to never take anything at face value. Don't look at a news story for how they are presenting it, look at it for what it means on a larger scale.

When you watch the news look for trends, problems and solutions. Then see if your business fits somewhere. You don't have to be obsessive about this but re-train yourself to look at the news in this way.

For instance, you've noticed three separate stories over the last few weeks about break-ins. You are a home remodeler, or window installer and break-ins really have nothing to do with your business. But you can pitch the media like this:

"There seems to be an increase in break-ins (then recite the news about the break-ins) If you'd be interested in a story on how homeowners can reduce their risk of a break-in, I provide a free window and door check for weaknesses that burglars exploit."

You actually install windows but if someone called you out about a possible leaking window or a broken lock or screen you would take a look right? So you're basically doing the same thing but taking a cue from the news and selling yourself in that way.

Media also like this. The truth is, it's tough to continually come up with new stories. And sometimes, when a reporter has been around for a while, it seems like all the stories have been done before. So someone coming in with a new idea, or a new twist on a familiar story is a breath of fresh air.

What Format to Use to Send Your Pitch

The format you send your press release in is going to depend on how much information you have to provide. If you have enough information that is needed, like bio information, pictures, statistics, testimonials, then go with a press kit. If your press release is more than one page with photos or you have samples you may want to drop it off.

Otherwise most organizations prefer email. Attach the file in a simple word document and attach photos. Copy and paste the text in the body of the email as well, because different computer systems can open only certain documents. Don't assume that the reporter will be able to open or even accept your attachment. If they can't open it they may not even have time to call you to let you know. By pasting it in the body of your email as well, it will save time and effort, because if they can't open the document they'll have it right there in the body of the email.

How to Build a Press Kit

A press kit contains several items in a folder. Usually, you will have all or most of the following:

- press release
- one page bio on yourself and your company
- page of testimonials
- photos of yourself or your product
- list of where your product can be found
- list of where you can be found on social media networks
- list of news stories in which you or your company has appeared or copies of articles that have been published about you or your company or have mentioned you or your company.

Not all of these items will apply in your situation. Determining how many of these items apply will determine whether you need a press kit or not. If you simply have a press release and photos then you can usually submit those in an envelope, or email.

If you do have a lot more items from the above list, a more professional way to package it would be as a press kit. This actually takes less effort than it sounds. Simply use a professional looking folder. If you have a logo you can print it out, apply glue to the back and stick it on the front of the folder if you don't want to have special folders printed out. Honestly it doesn't make much of a difference. Unless you are submitting several of these out to many different media outlets I'd forgo the expense of having folders printed out and use a basic folder to keep things together and organized.

Inside the folder you will place photos in one pocket on the left hand side. On the right side place your other materials with the press release on top. If you'd like you can include a cover letter on top of the press release addressing the editor or reporter you are giving it to and explaining what they can find inside:

“Dear editor:

As per our conversation of Tuesday, here is the press release announcing my new product line that will be included in every Toys R Us store starting March 1. Enclosed you will find a press release regarding the announcement, some comments from celebrities who have used my products, two articles from national baby magazines that have mentioned my product and some photos for your use. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me.”

If you are going through the trouble to build a press kit, make sure you include as much information as possible. For instance, maybe you aren't including testimonials because you don't have any. But can you quickly rustle up four or five comments by asking some satisfied customers to provide you with a quote before you submit the press kit? If you don't have a website or social media presence, which you should, can you quickly get a site or at least set up some social media profiles so you can include that information?

How to Write a Press Release

I'm going to take this step by step because there are a lot of elements people forget that are so important. So let's go over the elements:

- Contact info (for the press)
- Contact info (for the public)
- Headline
- Subhead
- Dateline
- Body. Otherwise known as the who, what, where, when why of the release
- Boilerplate

Contact info (for the press)

Start your press release with the contact info in the upper left corner. This contact info should be the person who the reporter should contact with questions about the press release. This person may differ from the contact person you list in the body of the press release.

Underneath the contact information, include the date. This isn't a big deal but it helps to know approximately when the press release came in. If it's been sitting on my desk and I pick it up I want to know at a glance how old the release is, if I have overlooked it for a week, or if it just came in.

You can also include a sentence or two of introduction. Basically this would be "Dear Editor, Please consider the following for publication where ever you deem appropriate." And your name. Or something to that affect.

Headline

Create a headline or basically a snappy one line summary of your press release and center and bold it above the body of your press release, like this:

ABC Books closes final chapter on its downtown store

Subead

This is similar to the headline but allows you to expand a little bit more. Center this under the headline and italicize it no period at the end. Like this:

The 25 year-old-store shuts its doors Friday only to reopen a full fledged online store with expanded selection of titles

Dateline

This is not always necessary and is kind of old school, but it's a location that starts off your press release, usually the city and state where you are writing the press release.

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. -- A beloved place to buy books will close this week only to open online...

Body

Comes right after the dateline. People stress over this but really it's not that hard. The thing you have to keep in mind is your press release will be re-written if it gets into the paper. Also format doesn't have to be exact but you want it to look professional. More than anything, have something compelling to say and make sure it make sense.

Contact info (for the public)

OK this info is the name and phone number that you will want the public to see. Now this info may not apply to your press release. Generally it's something like, an event you

are having and you are inviting the public to contact someone to make reservations etc. If there is no event you can include:

For more information about ABC Books visit www.ourwebsite.com

Boiler plate

This is the very last paragraph at the bottom of your press release. Leave a space between the body of your press release and the boilerplate. Usually you will start the boilerplate off with "About". For instance, **About ABC Books** and bold it. Below that you will create a paragraph that gives a standard description of your business. You can use this description on every press release. For example:

About ABC Books

For 25 years ABC Books has provided the Colorado Springs area with children's books, educational toys and teacher's supplies. Started in the basement of longtime residents Jim and Jane Doe, ABC Books has grown to 30 stores in 15 cities throughout Colorado, selling books and supplies and contributing to literacy programs. In 2009 ABC Books received Colorado's Golden Letter Award for its contribution to literacy.

Remember:

- Keep it to one to two pages if possible
- Don't get too detailed, the details can come later if they choose to do the story.
- Stick with the main points
- Make sure you include the who, what, when, where, why
- Write in the third-person to keep an objective voice
- Write active, not passive, often that means taking out the *is* and *are* and *be* and rewording the phrase. *A fundraiser will be held by the West Coast Art Academy*

should be *West Coast Art Academy will host a fundraiser ...* slight difference but it's written in active voice.

- Add quotes, even if you are quoting yourself. Quotes are a great way to give a bit of blatant self-promotion, or talk about how great your product or service is in a way you can't in the rest of the press release.

Here's an example of a press release. I've used an actual press release I wrote for one of my clients and changed her name and the website address and instead used my website. But I wanted you to get a clear picture of what a press release can be and that's why I'm using an actual press release:

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Dec. 15, 2009

Contact: Jane Doe (800) 555-5555 Admin@BeachBettypr.com

BeachBettyPR.com comes to the rescue of time crunched bloggers

Texas mom launches BeachBettyPR.com offering virtual assistant services as well as a free service that brings bloggers together

For parenting bloggers, time is a precious commodity when trying to balance a family and build a profitable and productive blog. Just ask Jane Doe. The Texas-based mom of four knows first hand how hard it is to juggle family responsibilities while keeping up with a blog. So she launched BeachBettyPR.com, providing administrative assistance to other bloggers.

With her site BeachBettyPR.com, Doe offers virtual assistant services to help other bloggers stay on top of the daily maintenance of their blogs. Doe combines her years of writing and marketing experience to offer administrative services like managing direct ad sales, finding appropriate stock photos, managing blogrolls, submitting posts to social media sites and managing social media accounts. She even handles newsletter creation, answers emails, and requests relevant products for review from companies on a blogger's behalf.

But as a mom herself, Doe recognized the tough economic times, and she wanted to offer something more. She decided to offer a free service that helps bloggers find the help they need to grow their blogs.

“Mompreneurs and of course, Dadpreneurs are already limited on time as we try to build our businesses and raise our families. So I decided to offer this free service. It's my

small way to give back (some time) to all the hard working parents despite these hard times. In the end, it is my hope that it will help us all,” Doe said.

With the free service, bloggers can list their request for other bloggers to write guest posts for their sites. In turn, bloggers wishing to offer their writing services to other sites can post their offers.

BeachBettyPR.com was born out of Doe’s own experiences with blogging. When she began blogging, it wasn’t long before she realized she had a knack for it. Soon she became the solution for friends needing assistance with various tasks to maintain their own blogs. Now that the site has officially launched, Doe hopes it will help in the success of many other bloggers just starting out.

To find out more about virtual assistant services for bloggers or to find, or offer guest posting services, visit www.BeachBettyPR.com

About BeachBettyPR.com

BeachBettyPR.com provides virtual assistant services to help bloggers build and maintain productive blogs. Started by Jane Doe, a busy blogger and mother of four, the site also offers a free service that puts bloggers seeking guest posts in touch with bloggers offering guest posting services.

Again, this is an actual press release but I substituted my name in place of the business. But as you can see it has all the elements there.

How to Get Testimonials

One of the things you want to include in your press kit or press release is testimonials. You can include testimonials in your press release but they work best as part of an overall press kit.

Testimonials are not hard to get. You simply need to ask for them.

Ask for them on your website or blog, send out a Twitter post asking for testimonials. Post it on Facebook that you are looking for testimonials. Seek out any posts or letters or emails that you may have from customers thanking you and ask them if you can use an excerpt for promotional purposes. Usually satisfied customers that took the time to thank you by writing a letter or email are more than happy to let you use their words as a testimonial.

If you have a brick and mortar business put out comment forms or a box in a prominent place and invite people to comment, even if it's unanimously. Make sure you let them know or put up a sign that says their comments may be used for promotional purposes.

You can also ask former clients or customers you are sure would say something positive to write a paragraph about their experience. Especially if it's a regular customer or someone with whom you have a good relationship. Don't hesitate to ask them to review you or write a few short paragraphs about their experience. Again, they will likely be more than happy to cooperate.

Once you get your testimonials choose which sound the best. You want something that doesn't sound scripted or too over the top. More than likely you will have to use an excerpt, and that's OK, just as long as you are not changing the meaning of the testimonial. So for example you may have a testimonial that says:

“My husband and I enjoyed staying at your hotel for our anniversary. It was the best trip ever because your hotel was the most lavish place I’ve ever stayed. The food was top-notch and the service was unbeatable.”

Now you can use the whole paragraph but more than likely you will want something succinct. So you can use the excerpt, “It was the best trip ever because your hotel was the most lavish place I’ve ever stayed” or you can use only part of that sentence “Your hotel was the most lavish place I’ve ever stayed” or you can use just the last sentence, “The food was top-notch and the service was unbeatable.”

Now say this person said “I hated your place, the service was lousy, but I had no choice but stay there. When I walked through the lobby I thought your hotel was the most lavish place I’ve ever stayed until I saw my room. Yuck.” You can’t excerpt the “most lavish place I’ve ever stayed” from that paragraph because that would be taking it out of context.

Photos

You will want to submit photos with every press release or press kit you submit if possible and if it makes sense to do so. If you are talking about a product, by all means submit a photo of the product. If it's your services go ahead and submit a shot of yourself.

Prior to submitting the photos however, try to find out what format the reporter prefers. Generally it will be high resolution photos via email, but ask first.

Here are a few tips on selecting photos to submit

1. Don't submit photos with a dozen people standing and staring at the camera. Same goes for the handshake and ribbon cutting photos. But more so for crowded shots. No one likes a ribbon cutting photo or the hand shake ones but usually crowded photos are the worst. They are simply not usable.
2. Keep photos to no more than four or five people tops. Try to make them "action shots" Somebody doing something. This goes back to the smiling handshake shots. You really don't want people standing there smiling at the camera. Of course this isn't always the case, but if you are announcing something about your business and let's say you are a baker, how about a close-cropped shot of you holding a tray of goodies versus you standing outside the front of your bakery.
3. Close cropped. Make sure it's not too far away of a shot and that there isn't a lot of distracting stuff that doesn't need to be there, for instance the subject is in the center of the photos versus a tree in the center and the subject off to the side.

Unless you know otherwise follow these tips for sending:

1. Try to send them as .jpgs format.
2. Do not send photocopies because they are pretty much useless when you try to reprint in a newspaper.
3. Send pictures in a high resolution format. High resolution means higher quality. You will lose some of the quality when reprinting in the paper so you want it to be as high quality as possible.
4. Large format. Don't shrink it, if possible when you email. But do check first to see how large of a photo that particular office can handle.

Also don't instruct the reporter to "grab" a photo off your website unless you have a specific section that allows downloads of hi-res photos. Otherwise doing a "save as" on a random picture on your website won't give quality results and many newspapers won't bother.

Reporter Pet Peeves

We all have them, these little things that bug and cause you to make snap decisions. You don't want to strike a reporter's nerve when you are pitching a story. Here are a few ways to avoid doing that.

1. Never talk about the competition. That means don't "threaten" to take the story to the competition. Don't say "Well your competition said they'd run it."
2. Don't belittle the reporter's newspaper or station as in "This is really a story that I'd have no problem getting on Oprah, but I thought I'd give you a chance."
3. When you submit a press release give sufficient time for a reporter to actually get it. Often that means give it a day or two. Don't call more than once a day. To you it may seem if you keep calling you are being persistent and while that's usually a good thing, there is a line and on the other side of that line is annoying. That's not to say don't be persistent, just don't overdo it. If a reporter hasn't called back in a few days, they may be on deadline, just back from vacation and trying to catch up, haven't seen your press release yet and want to review it before they call you back. Many reasons. So if you call before lunch and then right after lunch it's annoying. Call back the next day after the reporter has a chance to settle in in the morning.
4. Getting a pitch from someone who obviously hasn't read the paper. It's one thing to not understand the way that paper operates, for instance most people don't understand that weeklies differ from dailies in how and what they cover. But it's a whole other thing when you are pitching a story that was just covered. That says you aren't even a reader or viewer and didn't bother to see if your subject has already been covered. You can find out usually by running a search on the media's website for a subject similar to yours.

Who Should Get Your Press Release?

Who you target is going to depend on what story you are pitching and what angle you are pitching.

If your pitch is business centric, specifically your business, then you would contact someone who handles the business section of the paper. You can call the business reporter or the business editor. You can find this out by either calling the paper and asking the receptionist who that person would be or by checking their website. If it is a newspaper you are interested in sending your press release to, you can also check the byline of similar stories. Often these days reporters have their email address near their byline or at the end of the story. If you are looking for the editor of that section you can find that person's name in the masthead, which is a large box that lists contact info. It's usually located in the first couple of pages.

Media Distribution Lists

Should you use one? If the story you are pitching is very specific to your business, for instance announcing a new employee or new product line, you probably won't need one. Because the publications that will publish that type of press release will be either local media or very niche publications.

On the other hand, if it's something like a new product launch and you have an established national brand, you may want to seek out a distribution list that contains names of media in your market. So if you have a line of baby skincare products, then your market would be baby magazines.

Some of the downfalls to getting a distribution list is that they can be expensive. You also don't know if the lists are up to date. You may buy a list and then realize you don't need all those contacts. Sometimes they aren't targeted so you are just sending out your press release randomly to reporters who have no interest at all. So it may behoove you to look up your niche on your own.

The upside to getting a distribution list, besides the convenience of not actually having to look up contact information on your own, is that there may be publications you didn't even know existed that cater to your market.

Whether or not you need one really will come down to how far out you want or need to spread your message.

Here are a few reasons you might want a list:

- Introduce your company
- Product launch
- Significant partnership of national proportion. Say you are teaming up with the American Cancer Society, for instance.
- Any other significant news that you need to get out to as many publications as possible.

Major vs. Local Media

Who should you send your press release to, local media or national media?

Both types work differently. Local media has some advantages. Like I said previously, local media gives preference to stories with a local tie. So you definitely want to submit to your local paper and television stations. You may be reaching a smaller audience but it's still publicity and you will also get clips you can include in your press kit, website and other promotional materials.

National media on the other hand is a little harder to break into. The advantage, however, is it has a wider reach.

So how do you proceed?

1. Submit to your local media first, coverage there may give you extra confidence at the start.
2. Research national media and find the right ones to target. Don't just shoot out your press release to CNN or Fox News. There may be niche magazines that are better suited.

If you are looking to pitch to a magazine look at several issues to make sure you have the right fit. For other national media do the same. Look at whether they've already done a story similar to what you are pitching. If they have, find another angle to pitch. That's when having several story angles comes in handy.

How to Handle Small Town Media Competition

Even if you are from a large area you'll face something like this—media outlets that consider themselves competitors. Sometimes this can work for you but unless you are a seasoned pro I'd play it safe.

Decide what type of cover you are going for first. Be honest with yourself, if someone got promoted in your company and you are sending out a press release don't expect major coverage. If it's something that will likely end up as a small mention or if you are merely trying to set yourself up as an expert, send to both media outlets.

If it's a juicy story choose one or the other. We're talking small media here. Small town papers will want to know if they are competing so tell them you have submitted to them first rather than their competition and ask if they want to go with it. Give them a deadline however, and let them know that if they are not interested to let you know by that deadline so you can pitch it to other local media.

Major media won't care whether or not your hometown paper ran the story first or not. If they want it they'll print it.

However, the small town paper will care so you may give them a time frame. "I'd love for you to print it first since you are my hometown paper, so can you let me know if you are interested and I'll hold off submitting it to major media until after that time.

What to Say When You Call A Reporter

OK so it's show time. You are ready to call. Now what do you say?

Introduce yourself. Obviously, right? But so many times people get flustered when they call and don't identify themselves. They just go right into their pitch. You need a brief introduction followed by a summary of what your press release contains. Whatever you do don't give them every detail when you are giving your pitch. The reporter hasn't even decided if they want to do the story or not, so they don't need all the gritty details.

Here's a phone call I have heard so many times as a reporter:

"Hi. I was wondering if you'd do a story on my new book that I'm publishing. I'd like a story with pictures and everything, you know something big, not a brief or calendar listing or anything like that. Anyway, it's about crafts you can make with your kids on a rainy day. My book is really going to make a difference in people's lives because many people these days don't spend time with their kids ..." And on and on. When I finally get a word in and instruct them that I like to see a press release and any other materials before I decide whether or not to do the story I get this "Ok, I'll send it over then. Oh and let me just remind you that it will be available on my website. But not for another month. Because my website is under construction. And oh, yeah, if people want to buy it my contact info is...."

The problem here is that the person totally disregarded the fact I said "Yes, I'm interested in learning more, please send me a press release I can review." And launched into giving me every detail. Am I supposed to remember all this? How does this person know I have a pen and paper? I could've picked up the phone line from the conference room or other desk. Plus who is she? This is one of those pet peeves.

Those specific details come later or if the reporter asks for them. Your main goal is to give them what they want. If they ask for a press release, get it to them. If they ask you to come in for an interview, be there.

So, instead introduce yourself, summarize what your press release is about in one sentence and then ask if the reporter is the right person to talk to. For instance, “Hi my name is Shelly Cone and I’d like to submit a press release about my company ABC’s acquisition of XYZ Co., are you the right person to submit this to?”

Or, “I’m the owner of Goth Weddings I’d like to submit a story idea about the trend in black wedding gowns, would you be the right person to send a press release to?”

Note, don’t tell the reporter where you’d like the story to appear or what type of coverage you’d like. It comes across as a little presumptuous.

Once you’ve been informed about who to submit it to, ask how they’d like it submitted. Most reporters these days prefer email, but some may want it mailed. It’s really personal preference.

Then ask if you can follow up in a day or two to see if they’ve received it and if there are any follow up questions you might be able to answer. This simple gesture, usually smoothes the way for your second call. The reporter may not have you top of mind, but when you do call back they will usually recall that you told them you’d call. Reporters get busy and they do get those people who will call several times about their press release. You don’t want them to mistake you for one of those people. In short it just helps to let them know you’ll be following up.

The Follow Up Phone Call

A day or two after you sent out the press release or press kit you'll want to follow up. Make sure sufficient time has passed and the reporter should have had time to review the materials.

Call and re-introduce yourself and refer to the initial call and ask if the press release was received and if there were any questions you may be able to answer.

"Hi this is Shelly Cone of ABC company, I spoke to you on Tuesday in regard to my company's acquisition of XYZ co. and I wanted to follow up to make sure you received my press release and answer any questions you may have."

You may get a simple, "Yes I received it, thanks." Then you can reply, "I like to keep track of any press mentions of my company. Is this something that may get a mention in your publication? If so where and approximately when may I find it?"

Or if you don't feel like you're getting too much of a blow off then go ahead and ask straight out, "Is this something you may be interested in doing a story on?" It's up to you and it's best to read the person a little bit.

You should be aware of what kind of coverage to expect, whether your press release deserves a mention in a calendar or briefs section or whether it has potential to be a story. Be prepared to be turned down. Don't anticipate it but just don't let it take you by surprise. Keep your composure. Lay the groundwork for future communication.

"Well I'd definitely like to submit news items to you in the future and please keep me in mind as a source the next time you are doing a _____ related story."

Should you send a “bribe?”

This subject is tough because we all have an idea of what a bribe is and I think that idea is, say you get pulled over for speeding and you hand the officer your ID with a \$50 bill behind it. But that’s only the obvious type of bribe. Let’s look at the other things that could be a bribe.

1. Money
2. A product sample or service sample
3. A gift
4. Paying for items, like coffee and lunch

The short answer is “no” don’t offer a bribe intended as a bribe. That will backfire with any true journalist, or news source.

But let’s take a closer look at what could be construed as a bribe.

Money

This is an obvious one like I said. Just don’t ever pay to get a story published. You can do that. But that is called an advertorial. And you can usually tell that’s what it is because the reporter just glows about the product or if it’s in print it will usually say “advertisement” above it. Another way some publications do this is by selling an ad and then writing a separate “story” or “profile” about the business. If the writing is quality and you have some control, that’s not bad, but it’s still not organic. It’s not unbiased. And most of the time customers can see that.

Product samples

Be very careful about this. This area is one to tread lightly. On the one hand the reporter’s story may be better by trying out the product or service first hand. But giving

them something is a slippery slope. I was working on a story in which a sports shoe was offered for us to try on. I fell in love with the shoe but it was given only to try out during the sport we were participating in. We didn't get to keep the shoes. In hindsight I respected the company more for not trying to buy me. But experiencing the shoe was relevant to the sport I took part in and made sense so I included it in the story.

On the other hand sometimes offering product samples makes a reporter feel obligated to write something positive and while you may think that is a good thing it really isn't. If the reporter doesn't feel positive about the sample, but feels obligated, and tries to write something up it could end up being a piece that doesn't sound genuine. Or the reporter can feel so uncomfortable about it that they put the story on the back burner and, eventually, forget about it.

Gifts

There are two instances in which people usually innocently send a gift to a reporter.

--Right after an interview. You met with a reporter and hit it off. The reporter was thorough and spent a long time with you. It was a good experience so along with a note thanking the reporter for their time you also send along a box of chocolates.

The other time is:

--Right after a story runs. You were pleased with the story and as a polite normal person you send a thank you gift.

Now both of these situations seem like a normal and obvious time to send a gift.

Rules about accepting gifts vary per institution and reporter. I've heard some reporters don't accept any gifts with a value of more than \$25. Others accept less than \$15, or even less.

I've seen anything from bottles of wine, expensive chocolates, gift card sets and other gifts. And while they are appreciated, I've seen them sent back. But usually the reporter gets very embarrassed and uncomfortable and will share the gift, if possible, with the rest of the staff.

For the most part you should save your money. A nice thoughtful card will suffice. If you feel obligated to send something, a token gift or trifle will suffice. I once received a card with a \$5 Starbucks gift card that said "Thanks for your time, I'd like to buy you a cup of coffee." I thought that was pretty great.

But what about during an interview? You are meeting a reporter for an interview at an eatery. Who pays in that instance? To make it easy on everyone suggest coffee instead of lunch. Make the offer up front to pay for the coffee to make things clear. Otherwise suggest meeting at their office.

Offering to buy a reporter a cup of coffee is generally acceptable. Lunch on the other hand, sometimes gets uncomfortable unless it's a reporter with whom you have a pretty good relationship.

Preparing for the Interview

Now that you've submitted your press kit, got the attention of a reporter you now have to prepare for the interview. So how do you do that?

- Gather your materials

Have a copy of the press materials handy for reference. You want to be able to refer to what you gave them just in case they refer to it. You want to be on the same page.

- Know your company mission statement and know it inside and out. This will help keep you focused even if you get flustered about the message you're trying to convey or the angle you are pitching. You can always go back to your mission statement as a save.

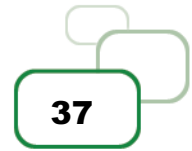
- Have an outline of points you'd like to talk about but know you probably won't be leading the conversation. Interview styles differ. Some reporters are tightly controlled, while others will say "Tell me about your company," which is basically a wide open invitation for you to dig in with your outline. Either way you will have all the important points in front of you for when the opportunity arrives.

- Make sure you have a succinct back story. If the story is a feature about your company you will be asked "How did your company come about" or something to that effect. Make your story compelling, emotional and interesting.

Be prepared for some common questions:

"How did you get your start/your company get started?"

"What were some of your challenges getting started?"



“Has there been a trend in (your product)/ Has (your product) seen a rise or drop in sales because of current trends or the economy?”

“What's been your most memorable/rewarding experience in running this company/providing (your product/service)?”

“What inspires you or keeps you going?”

You definitely don't want to be scripted when you talk but you do want to know what you are talking about and feel at ease knowing you have all the answers.

Remember, reporters won't send you questions beforehand, so don't ask.

The most important thing though is to be prepared and to be relaxed. Things will flow smoother and will stay on track as well.

How to Get Journalists to See You as an Expert

So whether or not your press kit garners you publicity, the first time out you still have a higher purpose—to build a relationship with the reporter and position yourself as an expert. So we talked about ending the call with a prompt to call on you whenever the reporter needs a source in your field. But that’s not where it should end.

Contact the reporter on a regular basis. Submit story ideas about your field and make sure you mention that you will be willing to offer your expertise to the story. Submit news tips, not just ones that involve you. If you hear something newsworthy in your field contact your reporter with a quick email or phone call. Reporters rely heavily on tips from the public for their stories, so any tips you provide will be greatly appreciated.

If you see a story in the national news about your field, call and mention it to your reporter and ask if they are going to localize it.

For instance, if you remember, last year there was an incident that made international news. It was the boy now forever unfortunately dubbed “Balloon Boy”. The world was captivated as they watched this homemade balloon that supposedly broke loose with the young boy inside. It turned out to be a hoax facilitated by the publicity-seeking parents. But days after the event there were several “experts” on everything from family therapy, to child psychology to yes, even balloons, that came out of the woodwork. I got press releases from several of these “experts” offering their take on the event. This was a perfect way to take a huge news story and tie yourself to it.

But the bottom line is, stay in touch. Call once you’ve touched base a few times through email. You want to get to a point where you can call every now and then and just ask “Hey is there anything you are working on that I may be able to assist with?”

The Way to Absolutely Get a Media Mention

Here's a quick rundown on how media works in terms of layout. Ads are sold. They are then laid out on the pages. After all the ads are placed, the space left over is called the news hole. Editors are given the news hole for their section and they plan what to fill with them. Inevitably when the editors are done filling the news hole with articles, there are spaces left over to fill and lots of times they are odd lengths. This is often how "briefs" sections are created. That and the fact, there are sometimes newsworthy items that deserve a mention but not necessarily a full story. Not always however. Sometimes briefs sections are a beloved feature. The other thing to know about briefs sections is that it is also an almost surefire way to get a mention in the paper.

Briefs

You may find that almost all departments have news briefs, arts briefs or business briefs. Sometimes they are called something totally different, but they are all the same—small mentions about something that doesn't deserve a full story but is worthy of note. These sections serve an important function because the lengths are easy to vary if needed.

Surprisingly, in my experiences these sections are the hardest to fill because reporters are so focused on the actual article content and largely depend on people to submit information for briefs. This is especially true for smaller and medium sized newspapers and magazines, TV and radio. Often even the smaller television stations offer something similar.

Apart from briefs there are a few other ways to get yourself in the paper when a reporter isn't interested in doing a story.

Letters to the Editor

Don't underestimate this section. Because it's in the Opinion section you have more control over what's published. But you want to be strategic about how you approach this.

Seize an opportunity to address an issue people care about. For example if say, you produce lead-free children's products during a time when there is concern about lead in products. That would be the perfect time to address the issue and highlight the actions your company already takes. So in your letter to the editor:

- Give value or inform the reader in some way
- Then highlight a related aspect of your company
- Provide your company stance

Commentary

Print publications often have on their Opinion section a page for commentary. This is also a feature of the opinion page but unlike a Letter to the Editor it's often arranged between the author and editor on a particular topic. This is where being the "expert" comes into play. Often an editor will invite an expert to write a commentary on a specific topic that's hot. But if you can expertly contribute to a current topic don't be afraid to suggest a commentary to an editor. Though, this is usually more successful with smaller publications, like your local newspaper.

Calendar lists

While this might not be the most exciting coverage you could want, it's definitely not to be dismissed. If you are having any kind of event (apart from sales, which would be advertising) put it in the calendar. Examples could be a visit from a book author if you own a bookstore, or a certain designer will be on hand at your store for a "meet and greet" if your store sells clothing.

The SEO Press Release

Just as you want to get your press release out there to offline media, you want to also target online media with your press release. There are several places you can put your press release to use online like press release distribution services, online media, blogs, and even your own website.

To get this exposure, you can go forward in much the same way you do to approach offline media, although you may want to format it a little differently when submitting it online. Re-writing your press release to distribute it online may seem like more effort than you want to expend but there are plenty of benefits to putting in the effort.

You will get backlinks from online news sites, which can help you increase your search rankings. If it's written with search engine optimization in mind it can help your website or blog in terms of increasing its ranking for your chosen keywords. Plus, many of the online submission sites are also highly ranked sites with thousands of visitors, meaning you could possibly see an increase in visitors who've run across your press release when doing a search.

When writing your press release for online purposes you will want to balance style and SEO. This is one way in which this type of press release differs from an offline press release. So you'll need to identify what keywords you'd like to target. If you sell coffee mugs your keywords would be coffee mugs, but you can also use phrases like coffee accessories or travel mugs or ceramic mugs or even coffee drinkers. Anything that you think relates to your business or site.

Then incorporate those keywords into your press release. Here's where the balancing act comes into play. You want your keywords in there to make the press release searchable but you also want it to be readable. So you can write it to say,

“ABC Coffee Mugs specializes in coffee mugs, coffee accessories and anything else you can drink coffee out of and more. Our coffee mugs are the best coffee mugs because our coffee mugs are made out of the best materials. Everyone loves our coffee mugs over everyone else’s coffee mugs.”

Sure, you’ve got all your keywords in there but no one wants to read that. Also, search engines are getting keen to that trick and may even penalize you. Instead, you can say something like this:

“ABC Coffee Mugs specializes in coffee mugs, coffee accessories and anything else you can drink coffee out of and more. Our coffee mugs are considered some of the best in the industry. That’s because they are made of the highest quality materials, making them durable enough to take your coffee anywhere, while offering a little bit of style with our own hip designs.

The body of the press release isn’t the only thing you should consider when thinking about where to place keywords. Your title will be even more important. That’s because the search engines will place higher emphasis on the title and it is also often the first thing that is seen during a search. Make sure your title is catchy enough to draw people to click or read the press release, but also targeted enough with your keywords that search engines will rank it high.

For instance:

ABC Coffee Mugs launches a line of unbreakable coffee mugs with hip designs

The coffee mug design company has seen its coffee accessories sales soar since the launch of the unbreakable mugs in November

To find online press release distribution sites you can simply do a search. There are hundreds, if not thousands out there. You will want to use the free sites at first. The pay sites will get you a little more attention, but in most cases not enough to make a difference. Save this option for when your news is really groundbreaking.

Here are a few submission sites I like to use:

- prlog.org
- onlineprnews.com
- openpr.com
- clickpress.com
- prurgent.com
- bignews.biz

Go Out There and Get Publicity!

So there you have it, getting a press release or press kit together isn't something you need to hire a big shot to do for you. With a little practice it will become second nature. You'll have the skills, the know-how, and hopefully, you will soon be able to cultivate some great relationships with people in the media. Now go out there and take action!

Now you know how to write and submit your press release. Want to know what reporters really think of some of the press releases that cross their desks? Sign up for my free report: [***Your Press Release Sucks! And Other Things Reporters Wish they Could Say***](#) at www.beachbettypr.com Hear from reporters and editors themselves about what they love and hate about press releases.