

A NEWS RELEASE IS NOT AN AD

By Angela Booth

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Summary: If you're sending out news releases and journalists aren't biting, you may writing them like an ad.

Category: Small Business

Words: 770

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You sent out a news release. Then a newspaper or a magazine (or both, oh happy day) published an article about you based on the release. Whoopee! Break out the Dom Perignon!

It's true, an article about your business does wonders for your business. Not only do you get an increase in business, but you can leverage the article in many ways. You can create reprints of the article to send to current clients and prospects, and you can use the article in your advertising. The article gives you instant credibility.

So how do you get all this free advertising? You're well on the way to that newspaper or magazine article if you realize that a news release is NOT AN AD. It's NEWS about your business. If your news release has a whiff of advertising about it, it will hit journalists' round files faster than it took you to lick the stamp and paste it on the envelope.

Unfortunately many small business owners, and even many copywriters, are unclear about the difference between advertising and a news release.

So what's the difference between a news release and an ad?

A news release gives the FACTS. Just the plain, unvarnished, unembellished facts. It doesn't try to sell the business. It doesn't say how wonderful the business, service or product is, it gives verifiable facts.

For example, let's say that you're a copywriter. You've gone solo, and have just started a new copywriting services business. So you've decided to send out a news release announcing your new business.

The fact that you've started a copywriting services business is a fact. The name of your business and its address is a fact. The hours you're open for business: fact.

A biographical note about yourself gives facts.

A statement that you make, in quotes, as part of the news release is also a fact. The release could include this paragraph:

'Felicity Jones said: "I'm looking forward to becoming a part of the Ocean Park business community. I've been introducing myself to local business owners, who have expressed strong interest in my services." '

Remember, a news release contains: FACTS.

A news release, because it's NEWS, is also written in newspaper style, that is, in Inverted Pyramid style.

== Inverted Pyramid style

A news release is written in "inverted pyramid" style. Imagine a pyramid. Stand it on its apex. You now have the broad base uppermost. This signifies that the base of the story, or the root of the story, comes first.

Therefore, news releases have this structure: a headline, and the first paragraph giving the most important information. The first paragraph tells the entire story.

Then each succeeding paragraph gives more information in order of descending importance. You can chop off any of the later paragraphs and still have the story make sense.

I like using a headline in a news release, but it's optional. Unlike the headline in an ad, your headline shouldn't be cute or gimmicky, it should summarize the story in five or six words. For example: 'Nursery Gives Away Free Trees'; 'New Store Opens'; 'Delaney Sponsors Local Swimmers'.

The first paragraph is your story in a nutshell: who, what, how, when, where and why. It's easy to write. Just state your case. Tell who you are, what you're doing, how you're doing it, where you're doing it, and why.

Here's an example of a headline, and the first paragraph of a news release:

LOCAL WRITER OPENS NEW COPYWRITING BUSINESS

Last Thursday, local writer Samantha Jones opened Pine Ridge's first copywriting business, "Just Add Words", at 4784 Boundary Road. Ms Jones said: "I decided to start my new business when I realized that Pine Ridge has two businesses offering secretarial services, and three printers, but no one's helping local businesses to write their marketing communications."

As you can see, it tells the complete story in the first paragraph, and it's all facts. Let's hope that some enterprising journalist decides to give Samantha a call, and writes a story about Samantha's new business.

If you're new to writing news releases, go to the library and take out a couple of books on public relations. The books will give you lots of information on how to find material for news releases, and also sample releases.

Beware some of the so-called news releases you find online. Most of these are simply advertising, dressed up to look like a release. They're not news releases, because news releases contain facts.

Good luck with your news releases and remember: just give the facts.

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