

# Online Press Rooms Save the Media Time and Frustration

By Marcia Yudkin

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Creative Ways <http://www.yudkin.com/marketing.htm>

When Web site usability guru Jakob Nielsen tested how well major corporate sites met the needs of reporters, he gave them a "D" grade. Journalists who tested sites for him located basic information such as the companies' financials, management team, commitment to social responsibility and a phone number for a PR contact only 60 percent of the time.

An excellent way to meet reporters', editors' and producers' needs is online press room, collecting what they need to know about your organization in one place. Some sites offer this as a subchoice under "About Us," while others have a major link called "Press Room," "For the Press" or "For the Media." By providing press-friendly materials on demand 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, you increase the odds of someone writing about you, using photos you've supplied and doing so with accuracy.

Your online press room should contain, at a minimum:

- \* An organizational profile
- \* Names and bios of principals and executives of your organization
- \* A PR contact with name, email address and telephone number
- \* Press releases, presented with the most recent first

Optional extras for your press room include:

- \* Online versions of recent annual reports or white papers
- \* Downloadable photos of products or key personnel

- \* Statements about relevant controversial issues currently in the news

- \* Suggested angles for feature stories including your organization

- \* Sample questions for talk show hosts

- \* Links to pertinent studies, statistics and news stories

- \* Links to previous coverage you've enjoyed

- \* Prewritten use-as-is stories or tips

- \* Audio or video clips, especially for music performers

The more lively the style in which all of the above comes across, the more likely you are to get journalists passing through to stay awhile and start thinking about how they can use what you've provided. Corporate-speak may please internal bosses, but it gets in the way here and may even provide fodder for the many sites that make fun of pretentious marketing blather.

Keep in mind that on the Web, media from all over the world and from outside of your industry can access your press room, so avoid acronyms and insert the kinds of background explanations that would be found in a quality news story. Dates are especially important to present unambiguously. Jakob Nielsen reported a case where a European reporter dismissed a company's news as old because it was dated 10-3-2000, which to him meant March 10 rather than the intended October 3.

Nielsen also pointed out that the journalists, whom his team observed in their actual work environment, often were using old software or hardware which crashed when trying to access PDF files or Flash sites. Remember that despite the apparent convenience of downloadable files, some media folks may for many reasons still prefer to receive a physical copy of your photos or your product - or a traditional all-in-one-folder, expensive-to-mail PR kit.

An online press room meets some needs, but not all, so be prepared to fulfill old-fashioned requests as well.

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