

Grab the Headlines; Craft a Compelling Press Release

By Sonali Raval

Grab the Headlines; Craft a Compelling Press Release

Sonali Raval
sonali@writeratwork.com

Writer at Work <http://www.writeratwork.com>

Grab the Headlines; Craft a Compelling Press Release
By: Sonali Raval, Writer & MBA, Copyright 2002

Have you been following the news lately?

Doesn't it amaze you that the media continues to report on every move Elizabeth Taylor makes? She hasn't made a movie in what, 25 years? And yet, every time she sneezes, its news.

Here, in India, Priyanka Gandhi-Vadra hogs the headlines. What has she ever done, apart from marrying a non-entity and producing babies? And yet, the press follows her around on a daily basis.

The point is -- if the media can make space for someone who hasn't really done anything interesting, they sure can give you a plug or two.

Almost any event can be turned into news if you craft a compelling press release. That means your press release must be "newsworthy", not promotional material. Editors do not like promotion; they like news. You have a good chance of getting a plug if your press release can convince the editor that:

- You are offering timely and newsworthy information
- Your company is new and different
- You are doing something unique or are specialized in nature

Editors want news, a "different angle". They want to publish something that their readers will like to read. Always remember this and you will never go wrong with your release.

Here are a few tips to get you going.....

Develop a News Hook

Not every event is earth shaking. But even ordinary happenings can be turned into a "newsworthy" affair. All you need to do is create a "hook" - something unusual, maybe even bizarre that hooks the reader's attention and keeps it. Often such hooks are a simple stunt; e.g. the day "Turok 2: The Evolution" was launched, the gaming company released large ads with a proposition for the public. Parents of a child born on that day would get a \$10,000 savings certificate as a gift if they named their baby Turok. The ad had its intended effect as numerous newspapers devoted thousands of

column inches to debating the ethics of this offer.

The Big Picture

Tie in your activities with a larger concern. When a considerable number of people are affected by something, it automatically becomes news. A veterinary pharmaceutical company needed publicity for its mastitis care product. It sent out a press release that stated, "Mastitis costs dairy sector Rs. 6053 crores (\$1.26 billion) every year" Having grabbed the editor's attention with the sheer magnitude of this problem, it then offered its product as a solution. You can be pretty sure all the editors carried this news.

Pyramid Structure

Newspaper reporters follow the Pyramid style of writing. All pertinent information is contained in the first paragraph. Subsequent paragraphs elaborate. Historically, editors have had a tendency to cut short the reporter's copy. So reporters developed this style to ensure that the readers get the complete story even if only one paragraph of their copy is printed.

Follow the same style when you write a release. Write a strong leading paragraph with the most critical information. Your first paragraph should answer the main questions: who, what, where, when, why and how. This ensures that if the editor decides to use just the first few paragraphs, all the information you want to convey gets printed.

Watch your Words

Keep your release clutter-free. Use short, crisp sentences. Break up large chunks of text into short paragraphs. Research shows that paragraphs of 5-6 easily digestible lines help the reader understand the subject, even if it is complex.

Avoid buzzwords, jargons, technical language and acronyms. Be Balanced. Junk the hyperbole. Fancy fonts and vivid colors are out. Editors prefer standard fonts like Arial (10 points) or Times New Roman (12 points).

Finally, do a word count. A good release says what it wants in less than 500 words.

Spice it up. Just a Little

Include at least one hard-hitting quote in your press release. It's your best shot at getting into newspaper column space. Reporters would rather include a smart, concise quote in their story than give a lengthy explanation or summary.

Quotes are an opportunity to emphasize your key points, so quoting your CEO or top executive is a good idea. Supporting quotes from analysts and customers add credibility to the announcement and key the reporter in to the fact that there are people available that they might be able to interview for a story.

Make yourself available

Reporters like to dig for more information. They are always trying to find a "different slant". They may not want to print a standard press release. They are more likely to contact you for a personal quote or unpublished information. So, make it easy for them to contact you. In your release, include the line, "For further information and clarifications, contact So-and-so." Give your contact information: phone, fax, email, and office address. And then, be available. And have some extra information to share.

Create a Press Kit

The press kit includes a background piece, press releases, photos of your executives or your products, more story ideas, reprints of previous articles about your business, a list of customer

references and anything else that the media might find newsworthy or just be a simple fact sheet on you and your company. The media may not use everything you give them. But they will keep it for future reference. And it's a great way to build a relationship with the press.

If you have got this far, you must have grasped the secret by now. The trick to a compelling press release is very simple. Learn to think like a reporter. Put yourself in her shoes. Anticipate her needs. Then, write a release that answers her questions. Before she can ask them. Simple, isn't it?

Go grab the headlines!

Sonali Raval is a corporate communications professional based in Ahmedabad, India. An Economist and MBA by training, she is a freelance writer by choice. Sonali's writing credits cover a wide range of feature stories and magazine articles, soft skills pieces, white papers, advertising copy, public speeches, brochures, business proposals, business case studies, website and intranet content and corporate film scripts. She helps business professionals craft crisp, convincing copy for all their business communication needs.

She can be reached at sonali@writeratwork.com;

URL: www.writeratwork.com

[Get-Articles.com](http://www.get-articles.com) : 1000's of reprintable business and internet marketing-related articles.

[Submit your article for reprint.](#)