



Devine Write, LLC

Business Education
Technical Communication



Writing a Press Release

A *press release* is a written document you create and send to the media. Depending on how relevant the information is to the outlet's readers (or viewers, etc.), you may be able to gain some valuable free publicity and get your name in front of the public for only the cost of a fax or e-mail. And a journalist may call you for additional details or materials.

Why would anyone publish what you send to them? Isn't that like getting advertising for nothing? Not quite, but close. Journalists, like many others, are overworked and underpaid, and are always looking for ways to make their life easier. One way they do this is by taking ideas submitted to them in the form of press releases. Sometimes they will re-write the press release for clarity or length, but they may often publish it as is, especially if it is well written and informative to their readers.

However, you can't just send a newspaper a press release and expect it to be published. Media outlets may get hundreds of press releases a month, and they may choose to go with only a few of those. What can you do to make your press release more likely to be used?

Remember that you are (usually) sending your press release to a news organization, and as such they want to report something informative to their readers, something they will expect and appreciate. Chances are they will not appreciate a blatant sales pitch.

Write your press release not as a sales pitch, but as a news item, and incorporate your product, service, or expertise into the release. To make the press release newsworthy, you will have to come up with a "catch" or a "hook" that will make the story relevant and timely.



For example, you might want to take advantage of other events in the news and explain how your product ties in. For example, if you are a computer consultant, you could write a release about the latest computer virus and explain how to avoid it. You would quote yourself as an expert. Or, if you run a restaurant you could offer your take on mad cow disease, and how it is affecting local business.

Other ways you can make your press release of interest are to:

- Explain how a new trend relates to your product. For example, a tattoo parlor could send out a press release about the changing nature of tattoo clients.
- Tie in with current events or holidays. For example, a jeweler might send out a release discussing the latest trends in holiday jewelry.
- Announce new products or services. You could send a release simply announcing a new product or service, or to announce the opening of a new location or the hiring of new employees. Chances are such simple announcements would only get a brief mention on the business pages (unless you are a pretty big company to begin with), but usually you'll be happy with any coverage you can get.
- Explain what's different or distinctive about your product. As an example, perhaps you have a unique way of styling hair. Writing a press release just saying that won't get much attention. But, if your press release pitches your technique as a way of styling that is more comfortable to clients, or can be used on the chemically sensitive, or is patented, then you have a hook that may be of interest.

As with anything meant for publication, the piece should be well written, with lots of active verbs and descriptive words, lively in tone and upbeat.

Press releases tend to follow a rigid format, but of course within that format you are welcome to say what you wish. Answer these questions to establish the facts you want to convey, then look at the examples and craft your press release for the maximum potential.

When do you want the press release published, immediately or at a future date?

Most press releases go out marked FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE. If you want yours released at a later date, say FOR RELEASE (DATE).

What is your contact information?

Always provide the name of a contact person and a phone number. If there are other ways to contact the person, such as e-mail or fax, list those as well. Be easy to contact!

What is the headline?

Provide a brief, to the point headline. Use the headline to grab attention and indicate the nature of the story.

What is the city, state, and date of the release?

Explain who, what, where, when, and why this press release is important.

The first sentence should be short, to the point, and as factual as possible. The next two or three sentences should fill in the 5 W's (and how), and state why the information is important or relevant to the reader.

What other details should readers know?

Additional paragraphs of 3 to 5 sentences can add detail, interest, and quotes to the lead paragraph. This would be the place to quote yourself as an expert on the topic.

Most press releases start with FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE. If you want your information released at a later date, state what date.

Be sure to include complete contact information so that you can answer questions or be available for more information.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Provide a catchy, interesting, and newsworthy headline.

Contact: Ben Martin
Owner, Ben's Best Bagels
456 E. Middle St.
920-456-7890
ben@bestbagels.com

Include the city and date of the release.

New Bagel Shop to Open in Woodbridge Mall

(Woodbury, Illinois) – (June 23, Year) Ben Martin, proprietor of Ben's Best Bagels, today announced the Grand Opening of his new store in the Woodbridge Mall to be held on July 3.

An announcement like this one should start out with "just the facts," followed by more interesting and inviting information.

The Grand Opening will feature free door prizes, balloons, and samples of the over 20 gourmet bagels that will be available at the shop. The proprietor, Ben Martin, said he believed that the shop will be a welcome addition to the community and that he hopes to soon add jobs to the local economy.

Ben Martin has received the assistance of several organizations in his efforts to open his shop, including the Community Action Coalition and the Small Business Administration.

Unessential or secondary information should go at the end, but include it if you have it.

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Use ### to indicate the end of the release.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Ben Martin
Owner, Ben's Best Bagels
456 E. Middle St.
920-456-7890
ben@bestbagels.com

New Government Dietary Suggestions Put Bagels In The Spotlight

(Woodbury, Illinois) – (June 23, Year) Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thomson announced new dietary recommendations this week, again encouraging American citizens to eat high-nutrition, low fat foods, such as bagels. Saying he was concerned that many Americans were risking their long term health for short term weight loss, Secretary Thomson repeated his earlier suggestion that everyone eat a sensible, balanced diet for long term health. Such a diet includes breads such as naturally low-fat bagels.

Ben Martin, owner of the locally owned Ben's Best Bagels, explained why bagels are such a healthful, nutritious food, either with a meal or as a snack. "Bagels, unlike many fast foods, are created without any added fats. Because they are boiled and not fried, they are naturally low calories, high fiber, and nutritious, just like the government recommends," said Martin.

Ben's Best Bagels has served the community only the finest in fresh, wholesome bagels since opening in 2003.

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This press release seeks to tie into another newsworthy event related to Ben's business.

This paragraph has the 5 W's and How, and ties in the dietary recommendations to bagels.

Ben quotes himself as an expert, which helps establish his credibility now and in the future.

This final line helps anchor the release and provides additional background.

Who Do I Send It To?

As part of your marketing research, you should identify what media your customers pay attention to. Concentrate your press release efforts toward these outlets. However, since sending press releases is essentially free, it can't hurt to send it to all of the media outlets in your area.

Your press release is most likely to be used by the print media, either newspapers or magazines, and less likely by the broadcast media (which often just repeats the headlines from the newspapers anyway). You should certainly send your release to any daily papers in your area, as well as any regional or community papers in surrounding communities. If your area has a weekly alternative paper, be sure to hit that as well.

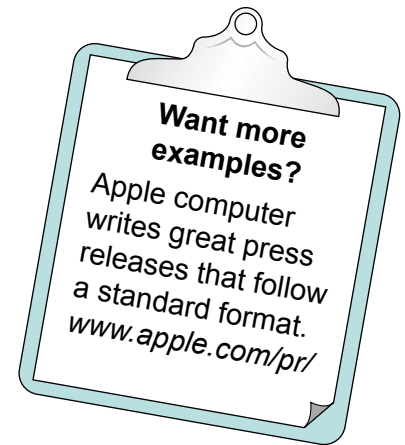
Look for and identify any free or targeted publications that may also run your item. In my area we have monthly magazines or newsletters for the gay, African American, and Hispanic communities, as well as publications directed towards women, renters, car buyers, and musicians.

Press releases are more likely to be used if you can identify an individual working at the media outlet and send the release directly to them. Your best bet is to call the outlet and tell them you have an item that may be of interest to their readers – where should you send it? Many outlets publish the e-mail addresses of their editors and writers.

E-mail is one way to send your press release, although many outlets still prefer faxes. There is nothing wrong with sending your release via regular mail as well; in fact it may get more attention that way because it takes a bit more work to read. If you call the outlet for information, ask them how they would like to receive your release.

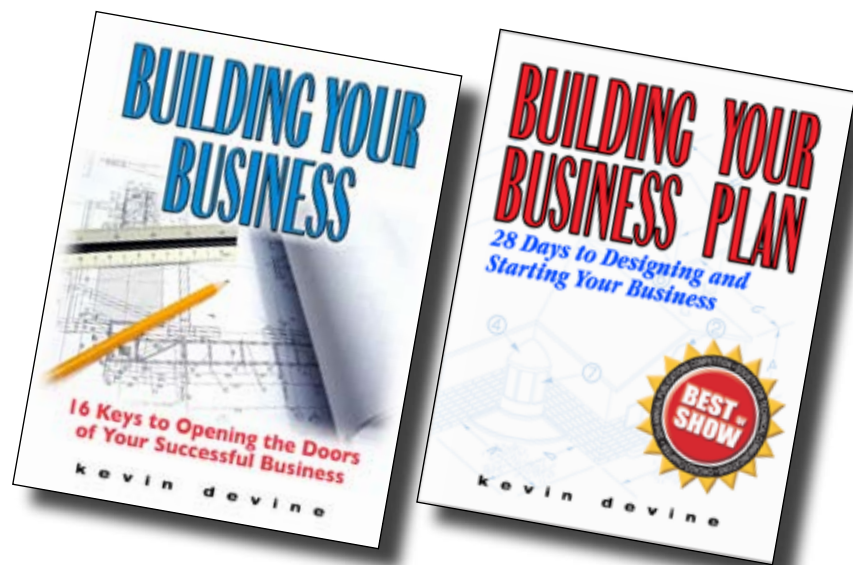
Follow Up

Several things may happen after you send your release. Your release may run more or less as you wrote it, which is great! You may even get a call asking for more information, which is even better! It's always a good idea when preparing a release to have some additional points to discuss if you happen to get a call, and to have some additional material prepared to send out.



On the other hand, your release may get put in the circular file (thrown away), never to see the light of day. This is actually what happens to most press releases. But don't be discouraged. It only means that your release wasn't newsworthy enough for the media outlets you sent it to. Wait a few weeks, be on the lookout for other reasons to send a release, and try again.

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