

# Chapter 9

## 9 Public Relations Writing: News Releases

- ❑ Fundamentals of writing
- ❑ The news release: planning a news release
- ❑ The news release: news release style
- ❑ The news release: news release format
- ❑ The news release: news release content
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### Objectives

At the end of this chapter students will be able to:

- Describe the fundamentals of writing
- Understand and explain how the news release
- Understand and explain the planning of news release
- Understand and demonstrates the style, format, content, and the publicity photos of the news release

## 9.1 FUNDAMENTALS OF WRITING

News is information which is not already known to the recipient. News is not necessarily about current events. It can be about anything which interests the reader. Newsworthiness means that information promises to be of interest to readers and is therefore worth publishing, and these standards should always be applied by the PR practitioners to test all news releases, articles and pictures to be submitted and all press events to which newsmen and women are to be invited.



The news release, also called a press release, is the most commonly used public relations tactics. The purpose of

news release is to disseminate information to mass media such as newspapers, broadcast stations, and magazines. A great deal of information in weekly or daily newspaper originates from a news release prepared by a publicist or public relations practitioners on behalf of a client or employer.

The media depends on news releases for several reasons, because the reality of mass communications today is that reporters and editors spend most of their time processing information, not gathering it. Second, no media enterprise has enough staff to cover every single event in the community. As a result, a lot of the more routine news in a newspaper is processed from information provided by public relations practitioners.

## 9.2 THE NEWS RELEASE: PLANNING A NEWS RELEASE

Before writing a news release, there should be a planning worksheet with a numbers of questions that need to be answered to give the release direction and purpose. A planning worksheet should be used to answer the following questions:

- **What is the key message?** The key message should be expressed in one sentence.
- **Who is the primary audience for the release?** The PR practitioners must identify the primary audience whether it is for consumers who may buy a product or service or is it for purchasing agents in other companies. By identifying the target audience, they will know whether the release is to be sent to a daily community newspaper or to a trade magazine.



- **What does the target audience gain from the product or service?** What are the potential benefits and rewards that the audiences will gain from the services or the products being offered?
- **What objectives does the release serve?** Identify clearly the objectives of the news release whether it is to increase product sales, or to enhance the organization's reputation or to increase attendance at an event.

### 9.3 THE NEWS RELEASE: NEWS RELEASE STYLE

There are four styles of composing news release:

- Releases should be composed in the style used by journalists, which is quite different from essay-writing, the writing of an answer to an examination question or writing of feature article.
- Releases should be set out in manuscript style, not business letter style, obeying printing rather than secretarial rules. The paragraph should be indented, omitting full points from initials of organizations such as IPR not I.P.R. and avoid indiscriminate use of capital letters for example Managing Director should be managing director.
- Releases should be appropriate to the journals to which they are sent. Technical stories for the technical press should be written in the correct terminology.
- Releases should be despatched to carefully selected journals in sufficient time for the story to be printed. This calls for a skilled compilation of a media list founded on sound knowledge of what stories the journals print, the process by which they are printed and the latest date for receiving a copy.

### 9.4 THE NEWS RELEASE: NEWS RELEASE FORMAT

The format of news releases should follow a standard, traditional format. The tips when crafting, news releases are:

- **Spacing.** Use standard 8.5-by-11 inch paper. It should be white or on the organization's letterhead. New releases should always be typed and double-spaced.
- **Identification.** Identify the sender (contact) in the upper-left-hand corner of the page and provide the sender's name, address, and telephone number. Many releases also include a fax number and an e-mail address.



- **Paper.** Inexpensive paper stock should be used. Nothing irritates an editor more than seeing an expensively embossed news release while watching newspapers die due to soaring newsprint costs.
- **Release date.** After the contact information, write *For Immediate Release* if the material is intended for immediate publication, which is usually the case. Some practitioners discard the phrase because they say that all news releases are automatically assumed to be for immediate release.
- **Margin.** Leave 2 inches of space for editing convenience before starting the text.
- **Headlines.** Provide the boldface headline that gives the key message of the release so the editor knows exactly what the release is about at a glance.
- **Paragraph.** Paragraphs should also be short, no more than six lines. A single sentence can suffice as a paragraph. Words should not be broken at the end of the line. Paragraphs should be completed before a new page is begun to ensure that a lost page in the news or composing room will not disrupt a particular thought in the release.
- **Proofreading.** Grammar, spelling, and typing must be perfect. Misspellings, grammatical errors, or typos are the quickest route to the editorial wastebasket.
- **Length.** A news release is not a book. It should be edited tightly so that it is no more than two to two-and-a-half pages long, or, for e-mail, two online screens. Words and sentences should be kept short.



The following are the guidelines for the content of a news release:

**Use Associated Press (AP) style.** The vast majority of newspapers and broadcast stations use this stylebook as a guide for word usage, punctuation, and capitalization. By using AP styles in news release, it makes the job of editors much easier and often makes a difference whether the release is used at all.

- **Be concise.** Edit the copy to remove excess words and “puff” words. Few news releases need to be more than two pages long. A reporter can obtain additional details by telephoning or e-mailing the source and checking for additional background information on the organization’s Web site.

- **Avoid clichés and fancy phrases.** When editors get a release that uses terms such as unique, revolutionary, and state-of-the-art they are likely to throw it away

- **Avoid technical jargon.** Releases purposely are written for general audiences, technical jargon should be avoided because audiences unfamiliar with terms and jargon used within the organization. The objective is to write for understanding not confusion.

- **Double-check all information.** Always be sure and absolutely certain that every fact and title in the release is correct and that every name is spelled correctly. Check the copy for errors in grammar, punctuation, and sentence structure. Make sure trademarks are noted.

- **Eliminate boldface and capital letters.** Avoid boldfacing key words or sentences and don’t place the name of the organization in all capital letters.

- **Include organizational background.** A short paragraph at the end of the news release should give a thumbnail sketch of the organization. It may be a description of what the organization does or manufactures, how many employees it has, or whether it is a market leader in a particular industry.

- **Localize whenever possible.** New releases with local angle get published more often than generic news release giving a regional or national perspective. Airlines, for example, “localize” news release about the total number passengers and revenues by breaking down such figures by specific cities and making that the lead paragraph for releases sent to journalists in those cities.



## 9.6 THE NEWS RELEASE: PUBLICITY PHOTOS

News releases are often accompanied with a photo. For example, new releases about personnel often include a head-and-shoulder picture of a person who has been hired as an executive or promoted in an organization. Another example, new product news releases often include a photo of the product in an attractive setting.

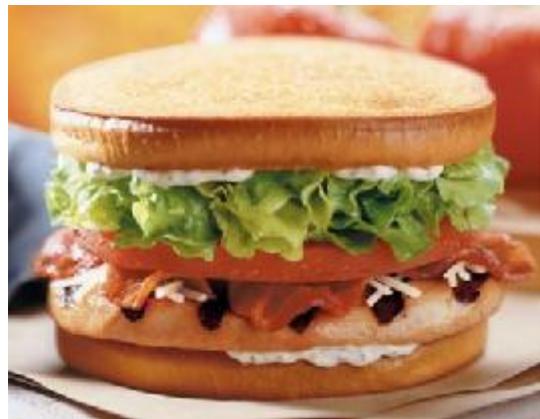
Studies have shown that more people “read” photographs than reading articles. The Advertising Research Foundation found that three to four times as many people notice the average one-column photograph is read than the average news story.

However, publicity photos are not published if they are not of high quality, resolution and if they don't appeal to media gatekeepers. Although professional photographers should always be hired to take the photos, public relations practitioners should supervise their work and select what photos are best suited for media use.

Here are some additional suggestions:

**Quality.** The photo publicity must have good contrast and sharp detail so that they reproduce in a variety of formats, including grainy newsprint. Digital photography is now the norm, and in many cases editors download digital photos from an organization's Web site. It is important, however, to understand that the beautiful photo on the computer screen may not come out the same way when it is printed, despite the claims of printer manufacturers. Most web sites use images at 72 dpi (dot per inch) for fast downloading, but newspapers need photos at 150 to 200 dpi, and magazines need at least 300 dpi. Photos also are supplied to editors on CD and in 35-mm colour slide format to ensure maximum reproduction quality.

**Subject Matter.** A variety of subjects can be used for publicity photos. Trade magazines, weekly newspapers, and organizational newsletters often use the standard “grip-and-grin” photo of a person receiving an award or a company president shaking hands with the mayor at a new store opening. Another standard approach is the large group photograph, which is all right for the club newsletter, but almost never acceptable for a daily newspaper.



**Composition.** The best photos are uncluttered. Photo experts recommend, (1) tight shots with minimum background, (2) an emphasis on detail, not whole scenes, (3) and limiting wasted space by reducing gaps between individuals or objects. At times, context also is important.

A photo of a research scientist, for example, may have more interest if the photo shows the individual in a lab surrounded by technical equipment and high stacks of data printouts.



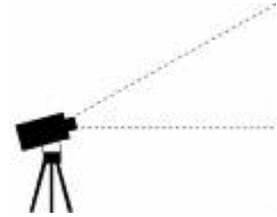
**Action.** Too many photos are static, with nothing happening except someone looking at the camera. It is better to show people doing something like talking, gesturing, laughing, running or operating a machine. Action adds the photo interest and indicates to the reader that something is happening.



**Scale.** Another way to add interest is to use scale. Panasonic, for example, illustrated its new memory card (which is smaller than a person's hand) by having an executive hold the card while surrounded by large stacks of printed materials that could easily be stored in digital format on the card.



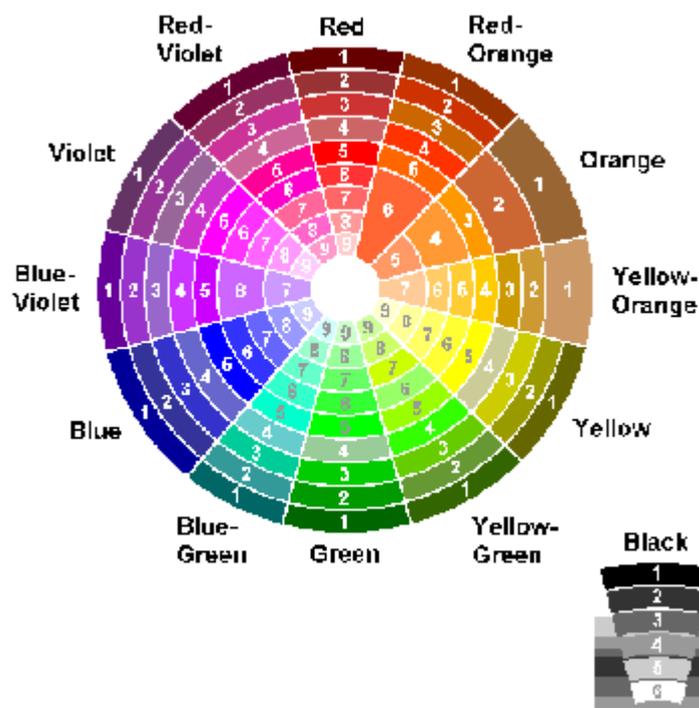
**Camera angle.** Interesting angle can make the subject of a photo more compelling. Some common methods are (1) shooting upward at a tall building to make it look even taller, (2) an aerial shot giving the viewer a chance to see something that he or she ordinarily could not and (3) using a fish-eye lens to capture a 180-degree image.



**Lighting.** Lighting is important for a very high quality pictures. Professional photographers use a variety of lighting techniques to ensure that the subject is portrayed, quite literally, in the best light. Product photos, for example, always have the light on the product and the background is usually dark or almost invisible. Background plays an important aspect. If the executives at a banquet are all wearing dark suits, the photographer should not line them up in front of a dark red curtain, because there will be no contrast.



**Colour.** Nowadays, cameras and flash cards, almost all publicity photos are in colour. Because of new printing technologies, many publications now use colour on a regular basis. Daily newspapers, for example, regularly use colour publicity photos in the food, business, sports, and travel sections. Colour can add interest to the pictures.



## 9.7 SUMMARY

News is information which is not already known to the recipient. News is not necessarily about current events. It can be about anything which interests the reader. Newsworthiness means that information promises to be of interest to readers and is therefore worth publishing, and these standards should always be applied by the PR practitioners to test all news releases, articles and pictures to be submitted and all press events to which newsmen and women are to be invited.

The news release is the most commonly used public relations tactics. News releases are sent to journalist and editors for possible use in the news columns, and they are the source for a large percentage of articles that are published. News releases must be accurate, informative, and written in journalistic style.

Publicity photos often accompany news releases to make a story more appealing. Photos must be high resolution and well composed. A photo can be made more interesting by manipulating the camera angle and lighting and by showing scale and action. Colour photos are now commonly used in most publications.

## 9.8 QUESTIONS

### Section A: Short answer questions.

1. What role does a news release play in the news process and what ultimately appears in the newspaper or in the broadcast news show?
2. How should a news release be formatted?
3. How should a news release be in style?
4. List at least six guidelines for writing news release.
5. Why is it good idea to include a photograph with a news release? What six factors should be considered with regards to publicity photos?

### Section B: Writing a News Release

Your company owns a chain of superstores all over Malaysia. A new store is soon to be opened at Putrajaya. The Minister of Trade and Industry has been invited to do the opening ceremony in three days' time. To attract the public, your company has decided to have a 3-day sale at the new store only beginning with the opening day.

Write a news release to be given to the journalists who have been invited to cover this opening ceremony of the new store.