

# Chapter 10

## 10 Public Relations Writing: Other writing skills

- The media kits
- The brochures
- The pitch letter
- The newsletter and magazines
- Tips on how to create newsletters and brochures
- Internal writing tools
- The importance of editing
- Distributing of media materials
- Summary

### Objectives

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

- Understand the various way of writing skills
- Know how the materials used for public relations writing:
  - The media kits
  - The brochures
  - The newsletter, magazines and pitch letters
- Know how to use the internal writing tools
- Demonstrate knowledge on distributing of media materials

## 10.1 WRITING SKILLS

Public relations practitioners are professional communicators. And communications means writing. Public relations professionals should write and speak better than their colleagues. Communication that is effective writing and speaking is the essence of the practice of public relations. Writing for reader differs dramatically from writing for a listener. A reader has certain luxuries a listener does not have.

For example, a reader can scan material, study printed words, dart ahead, and then review certain passages for better understanding. A reader can check up on a writer; if the facts are wrong, for instance, a reader can find out pretty easily. To be effective writing for the eye must be able to withstand the most rigorous scrutiny. There are several other writing skills that should be bear by public relations practitioners namely know how to write media kits, biography, brochures, newsletter, and magazines and pitch letter.

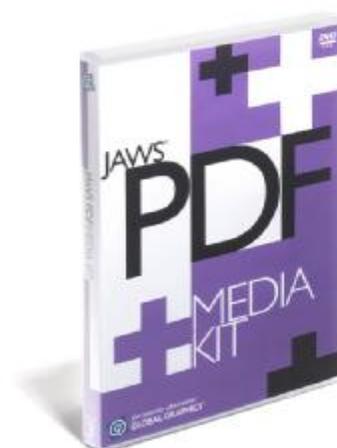


## 10.2 THE MEDIA KITS

Media kits also referred to as a press kit, is usually prepared for major events and new product launches. Its purpose is to give editors and reporters a variety of information and resources that make it easier for the reporter to write about the topic.

The basic elements of media kits are:

- The main news release
- A news feature about the development of the product or something similar
- Fact sheets on the product, organization, or event
- Background information
- Photos and drawings with captions
- Biographical material on the spokesperson or chief executives
- Some basic brochures



All the elements or contents of media kits are placed inside a custom-designed folder. The folder will vary according to the size and budget of the company. The typical media kit folder is 9 by 12 inches and has four surfaces: a cover, two inside pages (with pockets to

hold news releases) and a back cover that gives the name and address of the organization. A good example of well-designed media kits fit the organization's products and image.

Media kits need to be tailored to the individual's request. They can be handed out in person or send via the mail. The most important thing to keep in mind is that the "kits" provide a variety of information in various format.

### 10.3 THE BROCHURES

Writing brochures, like producing newsletters and magazines, requires the coordination of several elements. These include the message contents of the brochures, type selection, graphics layout, and design. Public relations personnel, who are often charged with writing content, work with designers and printers to make the final product.

Brochures are also known as booklets, pamphlets or leaflets depending on the size and content of the brochures. A pamphlet or booklet for example is characterized by a book like format and have multiple pages. An example of a booklet is a corporate annual report.

A leaflet is often described as a single piece of paper printed on both sides and folded into three panels, giving it a 4-by-9-inch format. Handbills and flyers are printed on one side of a page and are often placed on bulletin boards. For the purposes of this section, however the tern brochure will be used for all of these formats.

Brochures are used purposely to give information about a product, an organization, or its services. Organizations mail them or hand them out to their potential customers, place them in information racks, hand them out at conferences, and generally distribute them to anyone who wants basic information. Whenever an organization needs to explain something to a large number of people – employees, constituents, or customers - a brochure is a good way to do it.

There are some basic questions to answer in planning a brochure:

- ◆ Who is the audience? What are its characteristics? Is it a particular demographic in terms of education, income or ethnic background?
- ◆ What is the brochure supposed to accomplish? Is it to impress, entertain, sell, inform or educate?
- ◆ What is the best format forgetting the message across? Should it be a simple flier, a pocket-sized brochure, a cheaply printed leaflet, or a four-colour brochure?



Factors such as budget, the number of copies needed, and the intended distribution method also must be considered. Whatever the format, the writer should keep it in mind as copy is developed.

There are some common mistakes done when planning a brochure:

- ◆ The most common mistake is to write more than the proposed format can accommodate.
- ◆ A second mistake is to cram everything in by reducing the type size or margins, making it difficult to read the text. In other words, less is best so that there is adequate room for white space and graphics.



The concept of good writing also applies to brochures. Short, declarative sentences are better than compound sentences. Short paragraphs are better than long ones. Major points should be placed in headlines, bulleted or boldface.

## 10.4 THE PITCH LETTER

A pitch letter outlines why a periodical or broadcast outlet should consider the information as a news article, photograph, or video feature. Many public relations practitioners and publicists will write a short letter or note to the editor that tries to grab their attention. In the public relations industry, this is called a pitch. The letter simply lets the editor know, in brief form, about the contents of the media kit. The letter usually will be accompanied by a sample of the product.

Public relations practitioners send pitches by using mail, e-mail or on the telephone particularly to ask editors to assign a reporter to a particular event, to pursue a feature angle on an issue or trend, or even to book a spokesperson on a forthcoming show.

There are some guidelines for pitching stories by e-mail as suggested by Dennis L. Wilcox in his book title Public Relations Writing and Media Techniques, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2005, p. 207.:

- Use a succinct subject line that tells the editor what you have to offer; don't try to be cute or gimmicky



August 17, 1997

We propose entering into a joint venture with you to publish your book. Both the title and the content were well thought out, therefore we are confident the book will be favorably received. This type of book continues to enjoy considerable popularity and gross paper production and marketing, your work should do very well.

We have prepared a publishing agreement, in duplicate, for your consideration. This agreement will better define all the terms and conditions regarding publishing, pricing, royalties and rights. Please review it carefully and contact us with any questions or comments you may have pending your final approval. Both copies should be signed, one to be returned to us and the other to be retained for your records.

As indicated in the attached agreement, we intend to begin with a first printing of 10,000 copies of the book. You would receive a royalty of 90% of the retail price of the book on the first 2,500 copies sold and a 15% royalty of the retail price on all books sold thereafter with a projected retail price of \$7.99 per unit. We expect a rapid turnover on the first printing.

Given that most market royalties generally average 6% - 8% with most publishers, I think you'll agree that the royalty schedule we are proposing is quite generous and is also fairly designed to ensure a generous high return for the Author - particularly from initial sales. As the contract indicates, your commission on gross royalties on 10,000 copies at \$7.99 per book will be as follows:

90% royalty on the first 2,500 copies	= \$7,990.00 (Cdn)
15% royalty on the remaining 7,500 copies	= \$908.25 (Cdn)
<b>TOTAL ROYALTIES</b>	<b>= \$8,898.25 (Cdn)</b>

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- Keep the message brief; one screen at the most
- Don't include attachment unless the reporter is expecting you to do so.
- Don't send "blast" e-mails to large numbers of editors. E-mail systems are set up to filter messages with multiple recipients in the "To" and "BCC" fields, a sure sign of spam. If you do send an e-mail to multiple editors, break the list into small groups.
- Personally check the names in your e-mail database to remove redundant recipient.
- Give editors the option of getting off your e-mail list; it will make your list more targeted to those who are interested. By the same time, give editors the opportunity to sign-up for regular updates from your organization's Web site. If they cover your industry, they will appreciate it.
- Establish an e-mail relationship. As one reporter said, "The best e-mails come from people I know; I delete e-mail from PR people or agencies I do not recognize"

## 10.5 THE NEWSLETTER AND MAGAZINES

Most organization whether it is the local or international publish newsletters for their members, employees, retirees, and vendors and even for community opinion leaders. Subscription newsletters offer expert advice and inside information to individuals and organizations with specific interests in a particular topic or industry.



The typical normal newsletter contains four to eight pages and printed on 8.5 – by – 11 papers. Newsletters highlighted on short articles and have few graphic elements. It may be two-column format, and short articles are announced with boldface, underlined headlines on size larger than the text copy. In summary, the newsletters are economical, easy to design, and can be used to convey information in a straightforward manner.

Newsletter for employees usually report personnel promotions, forthcoming events, policy announcements, news from field offices, the introduction of new products, productivity achievements by employee teams, opportunities to attend workshops and seminars, and the typical announcements from human resources. The objectives of employee newsletter are to make employees feel that they are being informed of company affairs and news.



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An organizational newsletter aimed at an outside audience, members of the organization, or both, may contain items about political trends that could affect the organization, announcements of new programs, brief human interest stories, and features on community involvement. Many non-profit groups have newsletters for their contributors to let them know how the organization is using their money and what programs are being funded. A newsletter is a brisk compilation of highlights and tidbits, not a place for contemplative essays or discussion.

A magazine is the apex of organizational publications. It is the most elaborate in terms of colour, graphics, paper stock and design. And it is always the most expensive to produce. In general, magazines are written for its (1) employees and retirees, (2) stockholders and investors, (3) wholesalers of company products and (4) consumers.

### 10.6 TIPS ON HOW TO CREATE NEWSLETTERS AND BROCHURES

Newsletters and brochures should be designed to convey information in an attractive, uncluttered way. Here are some guidelines as adapted from Dennis L. Wilcox. *Public Relations Writing & Media Techniques*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2005, p. 352 on how to create newsletters and brochures:



#### Copy

- ◆ Less is better. Use short punchy sentences. Keep paragraph short
- ◆ Use informative subheads to break up copy blocks
- ◆ Use bullets to list key points
- ◆ Summarize and repeat the two or three main points
- ◆ Tell the complete story in headlines or pull-out quotes
- ◆ Keep the reader in mind; what does he or she need to get out of the story?
- ◆ Use quotes from credible, outside resources



#### Layout

- ◆ Don't try to fill every space; allow for plenty of white space
- ◆ Organize layout from left to right and top to bottom. Most people read in this sequence.
- ◆ Avoid large blocks of reverse type (white on black background). It is difficult to read
- ◆ Avoid photos and artwork as background screens for copy; it is also difficult to read
- ◆ Facing pages should be composed as two-page spreads; that is how readers see them.
- ◆ Use graphics and photos to balance blocks of copy
- ◆ Make photos and illustrations as large as possible. Whenever possible, use action-oriented photos.

### Type

- ◆ The best type size for text is 10 or 11 point with 2 points of leading. If the audience is older people, increase the type size to 12 or 14 point.
- ◆ Use serif type for text. It is easier to read. Headlines can be set in sans serif type.
- ◆ Use a minimum number of fonts and type families. A three-ring circus of type is poor design and just confuses people.
- ◆ Use boldface sparingly. Use for subheads and for a few key words. Don't use it for an entire paragraph.
- ◆ Use italic type for emphasis sparingly, if at all
- ◆ Avoid all caps in headlines. Capital and lowercase letters are more readable.

### Colour

- ◆ Use black ink for text. If you use a second colour, apply it as a highlight to frame a story, a pull-quote (set in large type), or an entire page.
- ◆ Headlines can use colour, but the ink should be on the dark side rather than pastel.
- ◆ Avoid using extensive colour on low-quality paper. If you have colour, use coated stock (glossy), to get maximum colour reproduction.



## 10.7 INTERNAL WRITING TOOLS

A variety of tools are written to be distributed internally. They are:

◆ **The e-mail memorandum** – E-mail memos are written for a multitude of purposes and take numerous forms. Even though almost everyone gets into the memo-writing act, writing memos correctly takes practice and hard work. The keys to writing good e-mail memos are clear thinking and brevity. Many memos reflect unclear thinking and are plagued by verbosity and fuzzy language. Inverted pyramid style is often a good to compose a memo. More often, rewriting turns out to be the key. Public relations people are expected to write good e-mail and print memos. This is no easy feat. The key is to keep in mind the six primary elements of a meaningful memo:

- State the issue. Do not dilly dally. Memos do not require preambles. Get right to the issue at hand.
- Back it up with data. Put the issue into a clear, snappy context so that the recipient understands your thought processes.
- Present alternatives. List all the possibilities that must be considered before rendering a decision. Again, brevity is a virtue.
- Offer your solution or recommendation. Be decisive. Stick your neck out. Suggest a clear course of action.
- Back it up with detail. Explain, again briefly, why you believe the action you have recommended is justifiable.
- Call for the question. Always end with a question that demands an action

◆ *The position paper*

- Public relations people are frequently called on to write a “position paper” also called a “white paper”. Written primarily for internal background purposes, position papers are long, and rigorously document the facts and assumptions that lead to a particular “position” that the organization is suggested to take.
- Such documents form the basis of review and discussion and ultimately serve as the nucleus for a corporate position. After such a position is ratified by management, a “sanitized” position paper may be made available for distribution to opinion leaders and the general publics.

◆ *The standby statement*

- Organizations sometimes take action or make announcements they know will lead to media inquiries or even public protests. In such cases, firms prepare concise statements to clarify their positions, should they be called to explain. Such standby statements generally are defensive – and certainly not meant to be volunteered.
- The standby statement should be brief and unambiguous so as not to raise more questions than they answer. Such events as executive firings, layoffs, price increases, and extraordinary losses are all subject to subsequent scrutiny by the media and are, therefore, proper candidates for standby statements. At any one time, a public relations professional, doing his or her job right, will have several standby statements at the ready should the dreaded call come in.



## 10.8 THE IMPORTANCE OF EDITING



Editing is the all important final touch for the public relations writer. You must edit and proofread your work. One error can sink a perfectly worthwhile release. Each word, phrase, sentence, and paragraph should be checked carefully. Good editing will “punch up” dull passages and make them sparkle.

Good editing will also get rid of passive verbs. As a result, this will produce shorter sentences. A good editor must also be gutsy enough to use bold strokes – to chop, slice, and cut through verbiage, bad grammar, misspellings, incorrect punctuation, poorly constructed cum-locutions and jargon.

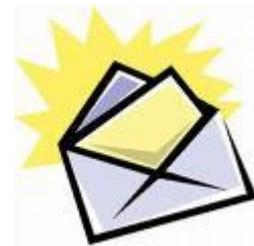
A good unabridged dictionary and a thesaurus provide the practitioner with significant writing and editing support. One release paragraph should flow naturally into the next. Transitions in writing are most important. Sometimes it takes only a single word to unite two adjoining paragraphs. Such is the case in the following example, which uses the word size as the transitional element. Writing like fine wine, should flow smoothly and stand up under the toughest scrutiny. Careful editing is a must.

## 10.9 DISTRIBUTING MEDIA MATERIALS

There are four major methods of distributing news releases, photos and media advisories. They are:

### Mail

◆ Mail is a widely used distribution methods, even in the Internet age. In other words, the world still is not a paperless society. Most of organizations and public relations firms continue to print news releases and media kits even when they have companion electronic version. The main intention is that to give editors and reporters what ever format they prefer.



### Fax

◆ A fax is as quick as a telephone call and has the advantage of providing information in both written and graphic form. The fax is used for late-breaking news developments or for sending the details of hastily organized news conference without much lead time. The reality is that modern technology has made it possible to send faxes to every media outlet in the country within minutes.



◆ However, fax is not recommended for mass distribution of news releases.

### E-Mail

- ◆ Most surveys show that editors and reporter prefer to receive public relations materials via e-mail.
- ◆ The key to successful e-mail is having a good subject line. It is also recommended that you never send attachments to a journalist unless he or she specifically requests them. This is because there are simply too many viruses going around for people to trust attachments.



### CD-ROM

- ◆ Best for background material, such as corporate profiles, executive bios, and product information sheets.
- ◆ CD-ROM is increasingly being used in place of printed media kits.



## 10.10 SUMMARY

Writing is the essence of public relations practice, whether involved with print or online work. The public relations practitioner, if not the best writer in his or her organization, must at least be one of the best. Writing is the communications skill that sets public relations apart from others.

Writing can be learned by understanding the fundamentals of what makes interesting writing; by practicing different written forms; and by working constantly to improve, edit, and refine the written products. When an executive needs something written well, one organizational resource should pop immediately into his or her mind: public relations.

The news release is the most commonly used public relations tactic. News releases are sent to journalists 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.

A media kits or press kit is typically a folder containing news releases, photos, fact sheets, and features about a new product, an event, or other newsworthy projects undertaken by an organization. Many media kits are now produced in CD format to save costs.

Public relations personnel “pitch” journalists and editors with story ideas about their employer or client. Such pitches can be letters, e-mails, or even telephone calls. A good pitch is based on research and a creative idea that will appeal to the editor.

Newsletter and brochures are relatively economical to produce and are used to convey information in a relatively simple format. Many newsletters are now distributed via e-mail. Intranets allow organizations to distribute newsletters with highly sophisticated graphics on a daily basis.

The objectives of brochures are to inform and educate. Brochures come in all sizes and formats. For mass distribution, a relatively simple brochure or flier is the most economical.

Publicity materials can be distributed in four ways namely by mail, by fax, by email and CD-ROM. Each has its advantages and disadvantages. Increasingly, publicity materials are distributed electronically.

## 10.11 QUESTIONS

### Section A:

#### Short answer questions.

1. List at least six guidelines for writing news releases.
2. What is a media kit? What does a media kit typically contain?
3. Before pitching an item to journalist or editor, why is it a good idea to first do some basic research on the individual, the publication or the talk show?
4. Various methods can be used to deliver publicity materials to the media. Name the methods and compare their relative strengths and weaknesses. Some experts believe that e-mail is the ultimate distribution channel. Do you agree or disagree?
5. Give some guidelines for writing and designing an effective newsletter or brochure.