

Press Releases Made Easy

Discover the “Secret” Formula for Perfect Press Releases, and Get Quality Backlinks, Targeted Traffic, and Exposure for Your Website or Online Business.

2008 Update

By Jennifer Mattern

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What are Press Releases?

Press releases are a common media relations tool, used to disseminate information (news) to members of the media. They're sometimes also called "news releases" or "media releases."

Press releases have been used as a Public Relations tool for over a hundred years as a means of providing information to journalists in as positive a light as possible before they would hear a negative side of the story from another source. It's sometimes called putting a positive "spin" on a story, or news angle.

Press releases serve a variety of purposes as a news distribution tool. They're used in times of crisis to convey transparency between a company and the public often in an effort to save, or regain, trust. They're used to make newsworthy announcements, such as a new product being launched, to a company holding a public event or winning a prestigious award. In the case of online PR, press releases are often used as a means of raising awareness about a website or an online business.

The traditional route a press release takes is from the issuing company or individual to members of the media, either directly or through newswire services. Those members of the media (as well as bloggers) then share the story with their readers (the end target audience of the company issuing the press release).

The Web now enables press releases to reach not only journalists, but members of a company's target audience directly by being included in news engines (such as Yahoo! News and Google News). That said, news coming from a niche media outlet, blog, or other source will often carry more weight to the reader (they trust their favorite news outlet or niche website more than they trust a message directly coming from your company still in many cases).

The Benefits of Using Press Releases

Traditionally, the benefits of press release writing and distribution include:

- Awareness / Exposure
- Trust through transparency
- Savings in reaching a target audience inexpensively
- Increased sales, memberships, or other measurable results, as a result of the awareness, exposure, and trust

With the growing popularity of online PR and online press release distribution sites, there are a few additional benefits of press releases, especially for webmasters and online business owners. These include:

- One-way incoming links (for search engine optimization)
- Placement in news search engines
- Increased traffic to the featured website

Building High Quality Backlinks and Targeted Traffic with Press Releases

The rise in online press release distribution is at least in part the result of search engine optimization and Internet marketing efforts. Mass-submitting a press release to many online distribution sites is seen as an easy way to get backlinks, as well as traffic. But there are a few problems with this:

1. The SEO rush on press releases (search engine optimization – using keyword phrases and incoming links to improve rankings in search engine results) has caused the Web to be flooded regularly with low-quality releases only posted for quick links.
2. The ROI on the time spent to submit to many distribution sites trickles down pretty quickly after submitting to one or two quality sites first, making mass-submission unnecessary.
3. Many of the incoming links obtained through this kind of distribution are of low quality. They only stay on pages with high page ranks temporarily before being archived and are often links picked up from “scraper sites” publishing the RSS feeds of the distribution site.
4. Much of the traffic from general online distribution is low quality, and sometimes even untargeted. The low quality comes from the fact that most people viewing an actual press release will only glance at it rather than read it, and many are only checking out the site to see if it looks legitimate enough to write a story on. That traffic isn’t likely to convert well.

That doesn’t mean you can’t get high quality backlinks and traffic. If you follow the basic rules of quality press release writing, from having a solid newsworthy angle to properly formatting the release and choosing the best distribution model, you can get a great trickle down effect. One or two large pickups will often translate into additional pickups from related niche websites and blogs. Even though backlinks and traffic don’t come instantly this way, the results are better long-term, with more high quality, relevant, and permanent backlinks on sites that directly reach (and influence) your target audience.

Old School vs. New School Press Release Writing

Press release distribution models have changed over the years due to changing technologies and the rise of online press release distribution. But technology has also caused a change in press release writing itself.

Old School Press Releases – While rarely recommended, in the past you were more likely to be able to get away with multi-page releases. Releases were generally tailored to print media outlets such as newspapers.

“New” Press Releases – Brevity in press release writing is more important than ever now. With new distribution outlets, more small businesses, website owners, and even individuals are adding press releases into their promotional mix, meaning there’s more competition for a journalist’s eyes. At the same time, online publishing opportunities have turned many an “average Joe” into a small media mogul, meaning there are more niche outlets available to reach a highly targeted audience. Two of the biggest formatting changes in new press release writing are the addition of summaries for online listings, and the addition of social media features (such as tagging and bookmarking options) by some distribution sites.

Some in PR push the idea of “social media news releases.” My philosophy is (and was even before the term was coined) to only include addenda that are relevant to your story. Don’t include a video just because you can. Don’t add social bookmark links that people don’t traditionally use with press releases (for example you’re more likely to get to the Digg homepage with a story pickup

The Media is Everywhere

Press releases were always traditionally distributed to members of the mass media (newspapers, TV stations, radio stations, etc.).

With the growth of online publishing and social media, the view of the “little guys” are often just as important. Here are some of the newer members of the “media:”

- Bloggers
- Small niche websites
- Online magazines
- E-zines / Newsletters

than your release itself). And enable comments only if you'll monitor and respond to them.

Give links in (or after) your press release to places where journalists or bloggers can find additional information, but don't add links just for the sake of building backlinks (if that link doesn't actually relate to your story, leave it out). Also, it's important to follow the rules of any distribution site you may be using regarding link usage and frequency.

If you want an all-out social media release, the best place for it is hosted on your own website (in your press room / newsroom if you have one). This allows you to include any media (videos, high resolution images, etc.) that you want, and allows you to personally host, control, and monitor comments (you don't have to worry about spam comments getting through on a distribution site for example).

You can learn more about my thoughts on social media releases in my interview with SMNR template creator, Todd Defren:

[The SMR Revisited: With Todd Defren](#)

The “Secret” Formula of Perfect Press Releases

The “secret” to writing press releases that get the best results for the time and/or money invested has less to do with the actual formula, and more to do with its individual aspects and the choices you make along the way. But first, here’s the formula for press releases that can bring your website or business exposure, traffic, and high quality, one-way, relevant backlinks from authority websites in your niche:

The “Secret” Formula for Perfect Press Releases

Solid News Angle + Well-Written Press Release + Properly Targeted Distribution = Your Perfect Press Release

Here’s why each aspect of the formula is important:

Solid News Angle – The news angle itself, and how well it’s conveyed in a press release’s headline, is the most important thing in determining whether or not you catch a journalist’s interest enough for them to read more, assuming you put the release in front of the right people. If there’s nothing newsworthy, there’s no point in issuing a news release. Keep in mind that just because it’s newsworthy to *you* doesn’t mean it’s newsworthy to your audience.

Well-Written Press Release – You could have the best news angle out there on any given day, and still get no coverage if your press release is written or formatted poorly. Journalists have certain expectations that you have to meet (online or off).

Properly Targeted Distribution – With many online distribution site options ranging from free to relatively inexpensive, many online business owners resort to them while neglecting more direct distribution models. Remember, it doesn’t matter how many eyes are seeing your press release. All that matters is that it’s in front of people who can reach your target audience, and that they actually pick up the story.

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What Makes a Story Newsworthy?

Let's tackle the first part of our "secret" formula for perfect press releases: the news angle. Having something newsworthy to say to your audience, generally through some kind of media outlet, is essentially what press releases are for. So how can you tell if a story is newsworthy? Here are a few signs that you may have a newsworthy angle:

1. It's timely.
2. It's genuinely unique.
3. Your story ties to a larger news issue affecting your target.
4. It's controversial.

Example Newsworthy Press Release Ideas

Company Launch – Sending a press release for the launch of a brand new company (online or offline) can be newsworthy.

Product Launch – Sending a press release for the launch of a brand new product (especially if the company has already made a name for themselves) is often newsworthy.

Website Launch – Sending a press release for the launch of a new website can sometimes be newsworthy (only newsworthy if there's something truly unique or otherwise attention-grabbing, and it's not newsworthy if it's already been done before unless there's major backing by well-known authority figures – even then the news impact is questionable).

Upgrades – Upgrades on products (such as software), or even websites (especially if it's for a popular website and the upgrades / updates will drastically affect usability).

Awards – Winning a notable award is generally newsworthy.

Executive Changes – When a larger, or well-known, company introduces new executives into its management team, or promotes from within, it can be newsworthy.

Contests and Events – Holding events can be newsworthy, depending on the appeal to the general population or even within a specific niche. Whether or not a contest is newsworthy will often depend on the award being offered.

Research Results – Conducting quality first-hand research and then publishing the results publicly is very often newsworthy, no matter what the niche is.

Change of Ownership – If a company or large website goes through a merger or acquisition, it will often be newsworthy.

Credit: These press release ideas are republished from my business blog: BizAmmo.com.

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How to Write a Press Release

These press release writing instructions can be used in conjunction with the sample press release template at the end of this e-book..

Release Time

A press release’s “release time” is the line at the top that says something like “FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE” or “EMBARGOED UNTIL DATE.” If the release shouldn’t be used publicly by a journalist immediately, it needs to include the embargoed date. Embargos can be less effective when publishing online, where bloggers and online outlets often look to publish immediately.

Contact Info

Contact info on a press release should include a media contact person’s full name, phone number, and email address. A website URL (or several) should also be included. A mailing address and fax or mobile number can also be added. Options are a good thing here.

Headline

This is your title. It needs to tell the reader what the news is immediately, while being attention-grabbing to make them want to read more. The essence of the news angle should be clear from the headline, and that’s more important than being “cute” with it.

Subheading / Summary

If you’re distributing a release via fax, a subheading is generally fine if you need to include additional information to the headline, but before the press release body. With online press release distribution, it’s best to include a 2-4 sentence summary instead.

Dateline

The dateline of a press release simply tells the reader the date the news is being issued and the hometown of the person or company putting out the press release. It appears on the same line as the first sentence of the press release body.

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Opening Paragraph

The lead paragraph of a press release should also be attention-grabbing, and should very briefly answer the questions of who?, what?, when?, where?, and why?

Press Release Writing Tips

- 1. Do Something Newsworthy** - You should only ever send out a press release to the media if you've actually done something worth mentioning (in their eyes – not yours).
- 2. Cover the Basics** - In the very first paragraph of the body of your press release, always cover the who, what, when, where, and why questions about whatever you're trying to gain coverage for.
- 3. Use Bold Headlines** - While some people prefer to write a press release headline, or title, in all caps, it's become better to stick with bold type instead. There are a few reasons for this. It's visually uninviting to readers. It's considered shouting (especially in online distribution). On top of those two things, many distribution sites online simply don't *allow* you to use an ALL CAP format.
- 4. Carefully Target Your Distribution** - Targeted distribution will usually win hands-down over mass press release distribution outlets. Find specific media contacts in media outlets that would have a particular interest in the topic of your release, and you'll likely have a much better response rate.
- 5. Don't Forget Your Contact Info** - Forgetting to include contact information while writing a press release is a huge mistake. People won't cover you if they can't reach you for more information.
- 6. Forget the Ad Copy** - A press release is meant to be informational in nature, not a sales pitch. Make it read like a short news story that you might find in a newspaper, and not like the marketing copy you'd find on your brochures or your website. Your release shouldn't look like a stockpile of adjectives. Follow the reverse pyramid format common in journalism (most important info first).
- 7. Write for Your Audience** - Write for the audience that you're trying to reach with your release (this means those that can give you exposure more than direct end readers of the story). Don't use technical jargon or buzzwords that might throw off the person receiving your press release.
- 8. Use Your Company Letterhead** - You should always send your press releases on your company letterhead (or with a full signature if they are submitted via email). The reason for this is simple: you want the media to know who's sending the release! While a contact name is great, the media should see your release and instantly know what company has sent it to them.
- 9. Find Specific Media Contacts** - It's not enough to hand pick the media outlets to receive your release. You also need to do some research to find out the best reporter or editor for your content if you want to increase your chances of coverage by sparking their interest.
- 10. Proofread!** - After you've written your new press release, be sure to proofread it! Having incorrect spellings and poor grammar might be the worst mistakes you can make. Sloppy writing won't get your press release anywhere but into the trash.

Credit: These press release ideas are republished from my business blog: BizAmmo.com.

News Release Body

The body of your press release should be written in a basic inverted pyramid style (from journalism), where the most important information is presented first, followed by background info, statistics, and other details, including quotes.

Boilerplate

A press release boilerplate is a short paragraph generally following a line saying something like “About Company.” It gives additional and general background about the issuing company or person, although not directly related to the news angle in most cases.

Call to Action

Towards the end of the release, you need to tell the reader what you want them to do. In most cases, this is simply a one- or two-sentence paragraph saying “For more information about...,” with the media contact person’s name and phone number included, as well as the Web address.

Closing

To let the reader know they’ve reached the end of your press release (and that there aren’t additional pages, attachments, etc.) use a closing mark such as ### or -30-. If you do have a second page, use something along the lines of –more- at the end of the first page, so the reader knows to look for more info.

Types of Press Release Distribution

Press releases can be distributed in a variety of ways. Here are a few:

- **Manual Distribution** – You can always go the DIY route by building your own custom media list. You would then fax, email, or otherwise send your press release to hand-chosen media outlets, whether it be your local newspaper, a major niche website, or even blogger. The key is targeting the right people at the publication, and sending the release in their preferred format.
- **Hire a PR Firm or Professional** – This is a good option if you'd like to go with a custom distribution campaign, but don't have the time or contacts to do it alone.
- **Newswire Distribution Services / Online Press Release Distribution Sites** – These services usually require some kind of membership (often free), but then you're billed per release for distribution, based on the geographic distribution area or other options (increasingly popular is the habit of charging more for packages with better search engine optimized releases). Free distribution site options (as well as no membership required options) do exist.

Choosing a Distribution Model

There is no one-size-fits-all model for press release distribution. Most sites will benefit from some kind of manual distribution, even if it's simply a slightly-altered version of their release being sent to local media outlets with a local spin on the news angle.

If broad offline media coverage is important, or just likely given the news angle, a newswire distribution service can get your release in front of a good number of journalists. If you want to reach predominantly bloggers and small niche sites, with the possibility of some larger online outlets, online distribution services may be a good option.

Here are some things to keep in mind when deciding on the best distribution model for your needs:

1. Your budget for distribution.
2. Your intended audience.
3. Outlets that would best influence that audience.
4. Whether or not your angle is newsworthy enough to appeal to larger outlets.
5. Whether you want to reach print media, online media, independent media outlets, broadcast media, or some combination.

Measuring Press Release Results

Just as there are several reasons, or goals, for writing press releases, there are a variety of ways to track and measure the results of a press release distribution campaign.

1. **Clipping Services** – These services will track any media mention of your company or website for you, and will send you the physical clips or reports on your media mentions.
2. **Email Alerts** – Several search engines offer “alert” services that allow you to track online mentions. You can set up alerts for your site or company name, key phrases from your press release, and even your press release title to track any word-for-word reposts of it.
3. **Follow-Ups** – In many cases with offline media pickups, you’ll either make, or receive, some kind of follow-up to alert you of coverage (such as a request for an interview).
4. **Search Engines** – Aside from alerts, search engines can be used to monitor new backlinks coming in from the dissemination of a press release (although they won’t show up immediately).
5. **Web Stats** – Your server stats for your company or website can show you any increases in traffic, and can point you to any potential increases due to the release (such as what pages on other sites are sending you traffic directly).

Sample Press Release Template

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Title of Your Press Release Will Go Here in Bold Type

When you distribute a news release on online press release distribution sites or newswires, you'll often need to include a short summary of 1-4 sentences. The summary will be displayed along with the title, usually on newswire homepage listings, in RSS feeds (syndicated blog content), and other places where the full release won't be listed.

City, State - Date - Type the first paragraph of the body of your press release here. This paragraph should briefly answer the questions Who?, What?, When?, Why?, and Where?

The second paragraph of the body of your press release should elaborate on your news, and give further details.

Continue with short paragraphs discussing aspects of your company's or site's news, such as including a quote.

You can include a brief summary after the details of your press release.

About Your Company

You should include a boilerplate (it will often be the same on every press release you send) with a basic description of who you are and what you do. Give relevant statistics, or any information that makes you seem newsworthy in a general sense (being a major international organization, a published author, etc.).

For more information about Your Company/Site or (specific news, product, etc. in the release), please contact Your Name at Your Phone Number.

Contact Info:

Contact Name & Title

Company Name

Phone: Your Phone Number

Email: Your Email Address

Web: Your Website URL

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Press Release Distribution Services

Media Directories / Media Contact Databases

These media contact databases / media directories will enable you to create your own custom media list.

[Burrelles](#)
[Cision \(formerly Bacons\)](#)
[Contacts on Tap](#)
[MediaMagnet](#)
[Bowker's News Media Directory](#)
[MondoTimes.com](#)

Newswires / Paid Distribution

Some newswires are free to manually submit press releases to their writers and editors. Newswire services and paid press release distribution sites only offer paid options.

[Associated Press](#)
[Reuters](#)
[Dow Jones Newswires](#)
[PRnewswire](#)
[BusinessWire](#)
[MarketWire](#)
[PRweb](#)
[WebWire](#)
[EmailWire](#)
[Mass Media Distribution](#)

Free Press Release Distribution Sites

These online press release distribution services offer free distribution options online. Several also offer upgraded options which include additional features. Note: Many free distribution sites don't allow live links within a published press release.

[PR.com](#)
[PRurgent.com](#)
[i-Newswire.com](#)
[Free-Press-Release.com](#)

[More free press release distribution sites from NakedPR.com.](#)

More Press Release Resources

More From the Author

The following is a list of articles, services, and resources I provide to help you with press release writing.

[Professional Press Release Writing Service from ProBusinessWriter.com](#)

[Effective Free Press Release Distribution in 5 Easy Steps](#)

[Sample Press Release Template \(Basic\) – Tailored to Print / Fax Distribution](#)

[25 Press Release Ideas](#)

[7 Signs That Your Press Release Sucks](#)

[What Press Releases Aren't](#)

[Get High Quality Backlinks With Press Releases](#)

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About the Author

Jennifer Mattern is a professional PR and business writer and owner of [JH Mattern Communications](#), where she specialized in online PR and marketing communications for webmasters, online business owners, musicians, authors, and other independent professionals before limited services to writing (such as press release writing) in 2008.

In addition to her direct work in marketing, public relations, and business writing, she runs a variety of blogs and websites dealing with industry issues, including [BizAmmo.com](#), [AllFreelanceWriting.com](#), [AllBookMarketing.com](#), [WebWritersGuide.com](#), and [NakedPR.com](#).

She also releases free e-books, white papers, templates, and reports for download periodically through her business writing services site: [ProBusinessWriter.com](#).