

INFOCOMM INTERNATIONAL CTS TOOL KIT: PRESS RELEASE BEST PRACTICES

MEDIA RELATIONS AT-A-GLANCE

One of the most effective ways to build awareness about your business and services is by obtaining press coverage. “Earned” media such as a news story or interview is often considered to be more credible and less expensive than paying for advertising and can be a valuable tool in enhancing the image and reputation of your company.

- The goal of media relations is to inform the media about your business and services, and to entice them to write stories about or include your business and services in appropriate stories in their daily newspapers, consumer and trade magazines.
- Media relations is not paid advertising, so stories that come from this effort hold the credibility of the third party (the reporter’s) endorsement.
- Reporters typically only write about a service if they believe their readers can benefit from the information. It is important to create targeted messages that are insightful, informative, and relevant to the needs and interests of your audience.
- The only drawback to media relations is that you have limited control over how your message is delivered. Therefore, when developing materials for distribution to media outlets, it is best that you try to develop your story as you would like to have it told.

PRESS RELEASES

At the heart of any media relations effort is the press release. A well-written release can dramatically increase sales, expose your company to new audiences, and positively impact the image of your business and service. Believe it or not, your company has many great stories to tell. Noteworthy projects, community involvement, expert insight on industry trends, the announcement of staff members who achieve CTS-certification – all are great opportunities for reaching out to the appropriate media sources and building a name for your firm.

ELEMENTS OF A PRESS RELEASE

All press releases traditionally follow a consistent format that includes the following elements:

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

These words should appear in capital letters at the top of the page before the lead paragraph.

Contact Information

List the name, title, telephone and fax numbers of your company spokesperson or media contact. It is important to include as much contact information as possible (including a cell phone), as reporters often work on deadlines and may not be available until after hours.

Headline

State the most exciting news or announcement in as few words as possible.



Subhead

Allows the writer to expand on the angle that they will take within the release in an attempt to hook the reporter.

Dateline

Standard practice includes the city the release originates from along with the final release date (FAIRFAX, VA—March 6, 2009). This appears as the opening in to the lead paragraph.

Lead Paragraph

Includes the most important information including the “who, what, when, where and how” of the story. If the reader were to only read this one paragraph, they should have the basic information they need on the subject to begin a story.

Body Copy

Backs up claim of the lead paragraph. Information should be arranged in brief, concise paragraphs with no longer than 2-3 sentences a piece. Write in an “inverted pyramid” style, beginning with the most important news and progressing down to less critical details.

Boilerplate

A standard paragraph that appears at the bottom of every press release that you send out. Consider it to be your company’s signature – it includes a sentence or two about your company and general information such as a website address, contact information and any other general helpful information.

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Follows the boilerplate, and officially indicates the end of the release.

OTHER KEY TIPS

- The inclusion of a quote from a high-ranking official (CEO, President) or a noteworthy figure in the body copy is an effective way to build credibility and perspective. The first quote typically appears as the third paragraph.
- Steer clear of phrases like “unique”, “state-of-the-art”, “breakthrough”, etc. and focus on the concrete facts of the story.
- Never use “I” or “we” unless it is stated in the quote. The idea of the press release is to create the story as you would like for it to appear in a publication.
- Shorter is better – a two page release, fine but if you can say it in one page, even better.

PRESS RELEASE DISTRIBUTION

When sending a press release, think about who in the media will be most interested in your story. Try to specifically target reporters and editors that cover the beats that your news would fall under, such as business, construction, technology, etc. Also, consider sending your releases to trade magazines or other publications that specialize in topics relating to your industry.

Three primary channels of distribution that are used when deploying media communications include:

- **News wires (PRNewswire, Business Wire, etc.)** – These are services where press releases are posted and available for all reporters of all media to pick up and use.



- **Email** – Sending out press release by email is a widely accepted method of deployment and most often used for print publications and web sites. It allows you to immediately customize and send your messages to individual media contacts.
- **Mail** – Sending hard copy press releases by the postal service is becoming less common but it is still an acceptable form of deployment. Slower and more expensive, it is often reserved for more elaborate press kit mailings or if you're trying to build a long-term relationship with a specific editor.

MEDIA CONSIDERATIONS

- **Determine the best medium for your message.**

Is your story better suited for print, online, broadcast, radio, or all of the above? Be sure to tailor your message accordingly.

- **Make your message meaningful.**

When sending a press release to a prospective contact, it's helpful to ask yourself, "Why would this media care about my news?" It is essential to pitch only stories that are truly newsworthy and a good fit for the media outlet.

- **Identify additional resources you have on hand to assist in telling your story.**

Downloadable photographs, expert sources, and an organizational history are all helpful pieces of background information that can build value and assist a reporter in putting together a compelling story.

- **Don't lose sight of deadlines.**

Keep in mind an outlet's lead time for putting together a story. Typically a daily newspaper requires 2-3 weeks for a feature story; monthly magazines require 3-4 months. Online outlets tend to require substantially less notice. As deadlines greatly vary, it is best to contact a media outlet or check their submission guidelines to determine how much notice they need.

