

A RECIPE FOR A POWERFUL PRESS RELEASE

By Karen Friedman

The table for two is ripe for conversation. You don't really know the person on the other side of the table, but getting to know new people really stirs up your appetite. At least, that's what you hoped would happen!

How do you respond when a person talks and talks, never coming up for air? Chances are, you choke on their endless chatter.

Press releases are no different. In fact, most releases are tossed in the trash. I speak from experience as a journalist who has packed many a trashcan. So, what separates a good release from a mediocre release?

For starters, don't send a press release unless you have something newsworthy to report. What you consider important is not always important to an editor or producer. They are not interested in furthering your career or promoting your client. They are interested in stories that affect their readers, listeners or viewers. The people who receive your press release are public messengers with short attention spans. If they don't instantly understand how the words in front of them affect their audience, your release will quickly sour.

That's why a press release must first grab the reader in the headline. Like the aroma of a good home cooked meal, the headline wets the reader's appetite, which leads to the first bite. That bite, which is the first paragraph, is called the lead and is the most important part of the release.

In two or three short lines, it should simply state what the story is about and why the reader should care. If your lead tells the editor what they want to know, they will be hungrier to digest the remains.

A release is simply a short version of a story you hope the media will share. So you should try to write the release the way a reporter would write a story. That means keeping it short and simple. One to two double-spaced pages gives readers' breathing space between bites. The idea is to peak their interest. If you manage to get your message across, it will be up to the journalist to sprinkle the article with flavor.

Finally, provide as much contact information as possible including contact person, address, phone, fax, email and web site. You should also include a brief line or two about your business or expertise.

When you think you're finished and have no more room on your plate, remember to add one final ingredient: spellcheck. A mis-spelled word can squash your credibility and leave a bad taste in the editor's mouth.

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