

**HOW TO WRITE A
BRILLIANT PRESS RELEASE
(AND GET THE COVERAGE
YOU WANT)**

INTRODUCTION

Did you know the first press release was sent in 1906?

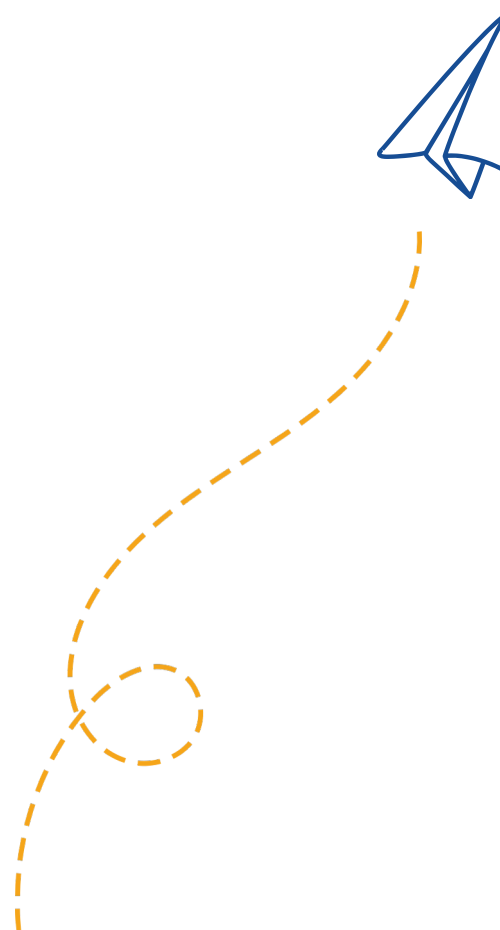
It was issued in Atlantic City, USA after 50 people died when a train derailed. Ivy Lee, who represented the Pennsylvania Railroad, compiled a statement for the New York Times.

The paper was reportedly so impressed it covered it word for word. And the press release was born.

It has since gone from strength to strength despite regular reports of its demise.

Now, more and more press releases are published on the internet every day. And there are now more than 25,000 global press release publishing sites. But many press releases are ignored or unread.

Isn't that something we should change?



WHY SHOULD YOU LISTEN TO US?

Good question.

You need to ensure you are investing your time and energy wisely.

The good news is you have come to the right place.

We have spent the last 40 years helping organisations of all sizes tell their stories through the media and gain better coverage.

Our expertise and experience are valued by everyone from charities to FTSE 100 companies – they keep coming back to us for more.

And this eBook pulls on our experience and insight in helping organisations benefit from the power of earned media (more on that on the next page), through training spokespeople, message development and testing sessions, press release writing courses and pitching courses for comms teams.



WHAT EVEN IS EARNED MEDIA?

Earned media is one of those terms we see and hear a lot about. And it can still feel vague and inaccessible.

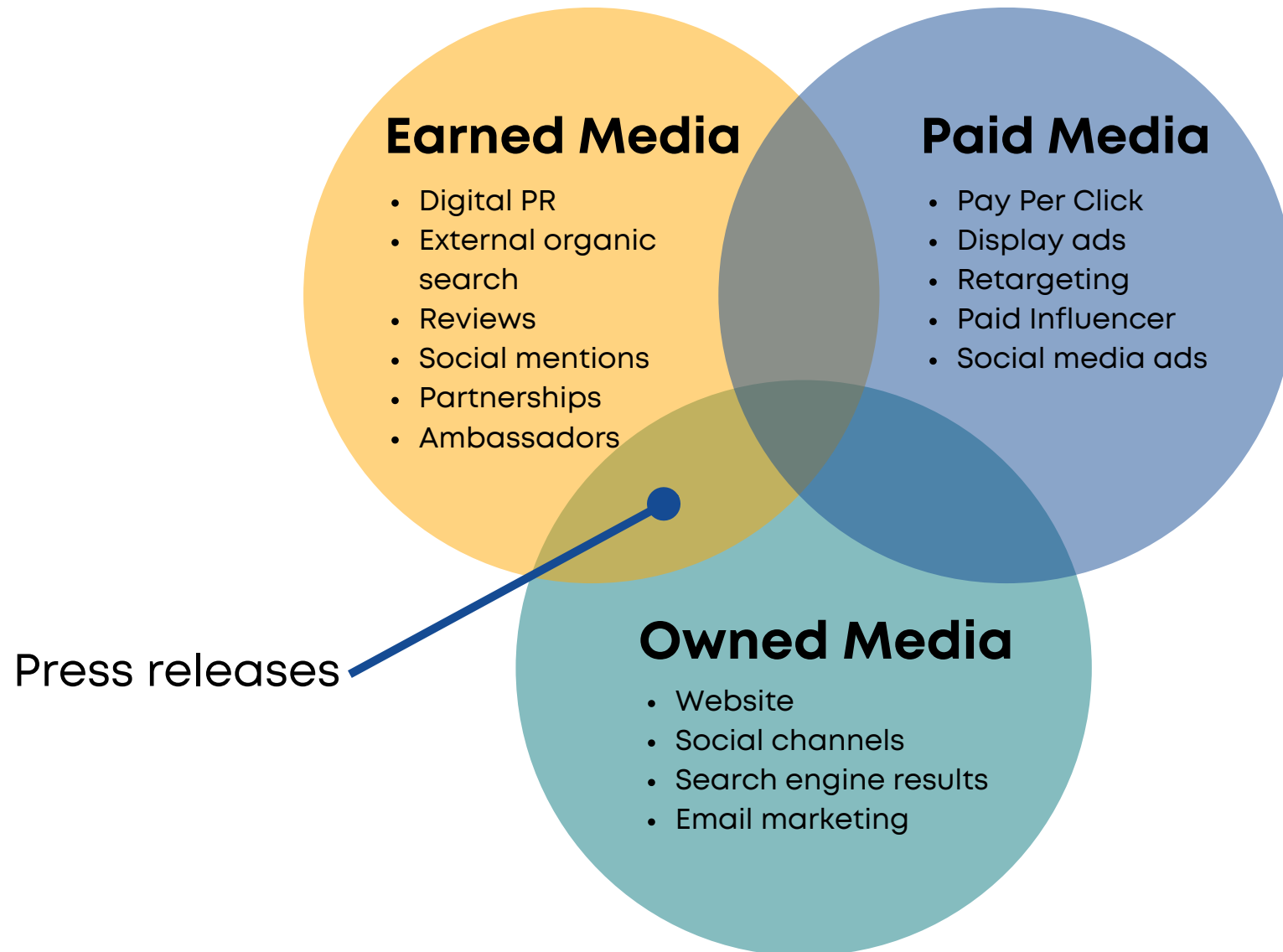
Earned media is the visibility your organisation gains through media coverage and social media mentions.

It is often contrasted with 'paid media' – the term given to traditional advertising and marketing efforts, where money ensures placement for your organisation.

You will also hear the phrase 'owned media'. Owned media refers to the communication channels you control, including your website, socials and podcasts.

A press release is owned media that aims to secure you earned media – the holy grail of PR and comms.

THE MEDIA MIX



IS THE PRESS RELEASE STILL RELEVANT?

There has been much debate about the press release ever since Alex Aitken, the executive director of government comms, declared it was dead back in 2013.

Yet, more than a decade after that prediction, press releases remain a crucial part of the comms toolkit.

And they continue to be seen as trusted sources of information for journalists. Cision's 2024 State of the Media report surveyed more than 3,000 journalists worldwide.

It revealed press releases are considered the most useful source for generating content and ideas and that, alongside newswires, they are one of the two most trusted sources of stories.

And, at a time when many newspaper newsrooms have been stripped back, a well-written press release can be used with minimal editing.

So, it is hard to argue anything other than the press release is still alive and kicking.

But, like the media landscape, it has evolved.

HOW CAN YOU WRITE AN EFFECTIVE PRESS RELEASE?

We will take you step-by-step through the process of writing a press release that will result in coverage, with tips and advice from our training courses.

And it begins with answering a fundamental question:

Have you got a story to tell?

Not everything is newsworthy.

The news might feel exciting in your organisation, but will anyone else care?

You must put your story through the ‘so what?’ test.

It is the question journalists will ask when they see your press release and consider whether it is interesting for their audience.

The TRUTH acronym we use during our media training courses offers another crucial assessment of whether something is newsworthy.

- T** - Topical – Is it new? Is it something people are talking about?
- R** - Relevant – Does it matter to the intended audience? Who does it impact? Will they care?
- U** - Unusual – People want to hear something surprising, unexpected, or that they have not heard of before. Is it the first? The biggest? The smallest?
- T** - Trouble – Does what you are announcing tackle a particular problem or resolve a source of conflict and frustration? Does it challenge conventional thinking?
- H** - Human - The crucial human-interest element. What does your story mean for people? What impact will it have on your customers?

WHO IS YOUR AUDIENCE?

Let's assume you have got something newsworthy to share.

Who do you want to see and hear the news?

How do you want them to feel?

What do you want them to do?

Lots of questions to consider.

But honing down on who you want to reach and how you want them to act helps you shape your press release.

And tweak it for different audiences - different media organisations have different audiences. This is critical, and you will have more success with your press releases if you create tailored press releases for each of your key media targets and journalists.

For example, you must draw out the local angle to help attract regional media interest.

And the technical aspect may need expanding to secure trade media or specialist coverage.



SOLID STRUCTURE

You've got a story to share.
How are you going to tell it?

The way the story is presented in a press release can determine its success. Journalists must be able to quickly tell you have a relevant story that will interest their audience.

Using the same structure of news stories is the best way to do this. It is called the inverted pyramid, and it is something we teach during our press release writing courses.

It is a structure that originates from the days of telegrams and places the most crucial information at the start to grab attention.

The idea is you should read the first few paragraphs and be able to see and understand the story and what it means to your audience. It means you must include the who, what, where, when, why and how information.

The next stage of the pyramid is where you include the supporting information. If you look at a newspaper story, the middle section – typically referred to as the 'body' - is filled with quotes, examples, statistics and additional sources.

The final part of the pyramid is additional information. It should include things like who to contact with more information and links to additional reading.

Let's look at the different parts of this structure in more detail.

HEADLINE

Your press release only has one chance to grab the attention of journalists and convince them to read more. And it faces plenty of competition.

Journalists can receive around 300 to 400 emails a day and may only read the subject line – which should also be your press release headline - before deciding whether to read or delete.

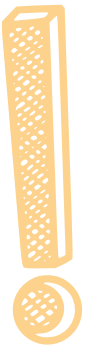
So, you must nail the headline.

It needs to be brief, punchy, and relevant to the audience. Aim for between six and 10 words.

Here are some more headline tips:

- Highlight the news angle – the first, last, biggest, smallest
- Use alliteration
- Use numbers if you can
- Avoid exaggeration, superlatives and hyperbole
- Stay clear of jargon and acronyms

- No one likes clickbait
- Aim for something unique – lots of headlines use words like ‘announces’ or ‘launches’
- Don’t use your company name – ‘Media First announces...’ sounds more like an advert than a story
- Write the headline last – writing the rest of the press release first can help generate ideas and shape your thoughts



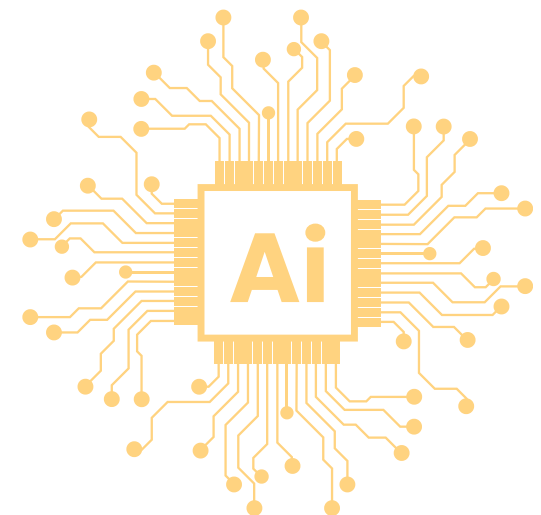
HERE ARE SOME ONLINE TOOLS THAT CAN HELP YOU TO GENERATE A PITHY HEADLINE (OR AT LEAST INSPIRE IF YOU HAVE BEEN HIT WITH WRITER'S BLOCK):

TextCortex: This is an AI tool that can help you create unique, catchy, and SEO-optimised titles for your press releases, websites, articles, and blogs within seconds.

SumoMe's Kickass Headline Generator: What a name. Decent tool too. It has tailored prompts based on the type of content you are creating. You begin by selecting from its predefined content categories and then then input information about what you are creating. So, if you opt for a numbered list, you will be asked for your topic, a desired (and undesired) outcome for your audience, and how many list items you want in the article. The tool then suggests a list of headlines.

Co-schedule Headline Studio: This comprehensive tool provides analysis, insight and suggestions on how to improve your headlines. It can even rewrite a headline from scratch. The tool works on all forms of content, from press releases and emails to social media posts and YouTube videos.

Chat GPT: The popular AI writing tool can be used to write and improve headlines. You can ask it to make headlines serious, positive, funny or negative. You can also ask it to write headlines of a particular length.



TOP LINE

When we looked at the inverted pyramid structure, we discussed how the most important part of the story goes at the start.

You need a compelling first paragraph that builds on the attention you have grabbed with your headline and convinces reporters to keep reading – they will not have time to read paragraphs of text to find the story.

Make them care.

This is often referred to as the ‘top line’ by journalists, and it should read like the opening of a news story.

It is not the place for background information about your organisation.

A good topline will contain most of the ‘Five Ws’ – who, what, why, when, where – and be around 15-20 words long.

Sounds like a tough ask?

That can seem a little daunting. But if you need any inspiration, look at any national newspaper and see how they summarise stories in their opening paragraphs.

MEANINGFUL QUOTES



Quotes are a crucial part of the body of press releases and can add credibility.

But quotes in press releases often fall into the trap of saying little of value.

Or read like leaders and subject matter experts patting themselves on the back.

No one cares how “excited”, “thrilled”, or “delighted” the CEO is about announcing a new service or launching a new product. Nor do we need to know how “passionate” they are about a particular topic. No one needs to read your self-congratulation.

And we don't need them to repeat what we already know from the first few paragraphs of the press release.

That is all pointless and boring. And does not pass the ‘so what?’ test we discussed earlier.

Quotes should offer something that sounds conversational, human, emotive, bold and punchy – essentially something a person would say to someone else. They should provide valuable insight.

It makes them more usable and gives journalists an idea of what they might get from the spokesperson if they request an interview.

Ideally, you should use a quote around the third paragraph of the press release.



THIRD-PARTY VALIDATION

No matter how good the quotes in the press release are from the people in your organisation, what is being announced needs third-party validation.

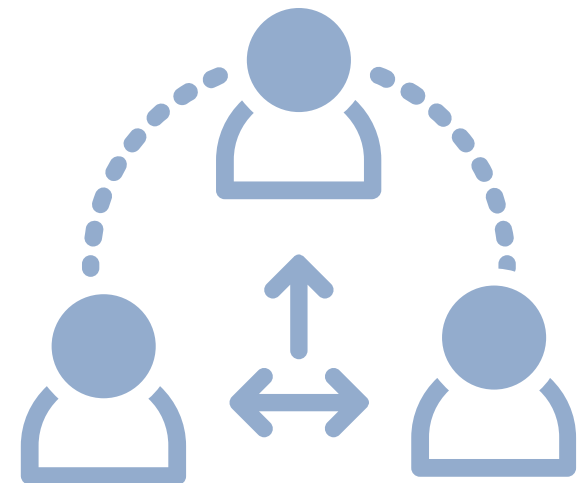
Why?

Because the media needs to hear from more than your organisation. Journalists need to back up and support your claims. They want to ensure the story is credible and unbiased.

And the words from others can speak loudly.

They could come from an independent analyst or expert, a representative or a partner organisation or your customers (this third category is so important it has its own section over the page).

If you don't provide this verification, the story could get shelved. Or reporters may use their own sources to back up the claims.



CASE STUDIES

Case studies bring the third-party validation we have just discussed.

They also help show journalists how the story can be brought to life and who can help them tell it.

But don't include the whole thing at this point.

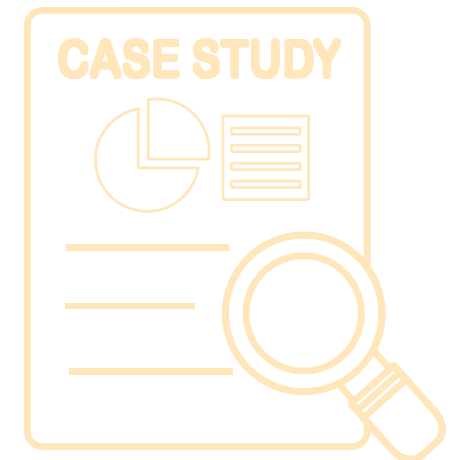
Instead, feature a couple of quotes from the case study to help grab attention and make it clear you have those people - and others - available for interview.

For example, let's say your press release is on some new technology that could help elderly people live in their homes for longer.

Your case study could be the family of someone who used the technology during a trial discussing the difference it made to their lives.

Case studies help show journalists that the claims being made can be evidenced and there are people they can speak with to build the news package.

And then, in the footer of the press release, add a note in the boilerplate (more on this later) explaining you can provide case study contact details to the journalist so they can do their own interviews.



EVERYDAY LANGUAGE

A press release is not the place to show off your wide range of vocabulary.

Make it easy for journalists by using simple, everyday language that is understandable, and avoids confusion.

Long-winded sentences and complex words and phrases will not compel journalists and convince them you have a story to tell.

Similarly, jargon and clichéd phrases will irritate and confuse reporters.

Here are a few examples you should avoid in your press releases:

Thrilled/Excited/Passionate: No one cares. It's meaningless. And if you were not thrilled, excited or passionate about the subject, you probably would not be writing a press release. Press releases containing these words are neither thrilling nor exciting.

Unique: It is unlikely what you are talking about is 'unique'. Words like ground-breaking/game-changing/cutting-edge/world-leading/pioneering are all phrases that are overused. They sound boastful. Often, they are claims that cannot be backed up.

Prestigious: If you feel the need to tell a journalist something is prestigious, it probably isn't.

Platform/Pathway/Customer journey/Imbedded infrastructure/Solution: No one knows what any of these mean. They are vague terms that attempt to make something sound more interesting than it is.

Omnichannel/Turnkey: No, we have no idea either. And as soon as we see them, we lose interest.

Disruptive: Every business now seems to want to describe itself as 'disruptive'. It feels lazy and is unlikely to impress cynical journalists.

Holistic: A much-used and abused word.

Don't let the message of your press release get lost amid superfluous language. Keep it simple.

Also, avoid wordiness. 'Due to the fact that' is a long way of saying 'because'. 'Has the ability to' should be reduced to 'can'.



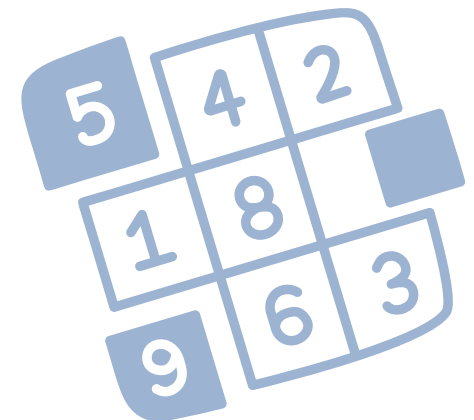
IT'S A NUMBERS GAME

It's not just words that are vital in press releases.

Numbers play a crucial role in stories, and journalists want more data. According to Cision, 68 per cent of journalists say they want data from PR professionals in the form of original research, such as trends and market data.

So, look to support your press release with facts and figures.

Remember, a press release should offer something new, so don't repeat statistics already in the public domain.



SIZE MATTERS

How long should a press release be?

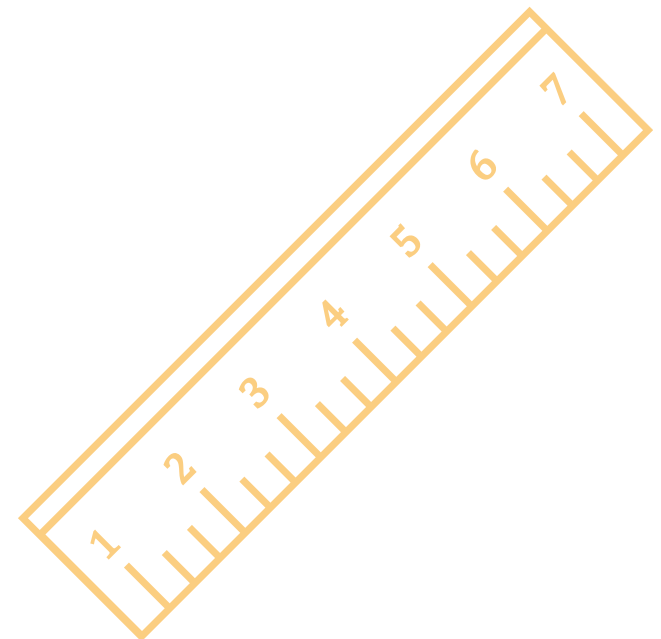
It is an often-asked question.
And advice tends to vary.

Some experts will tell you not to worry about the word count.
Others say no more than a side of A4. And we tend to side with them.

We believe press releases should be punchy.

We advise our clients to aim for around 400 words – a typical newspaper story length.

Remember, journalists are time-poor. They don't have time to make their way through pages of waffle.



MAKE IT MULTIMEDIA

The media has evolved.

And press releases need to change with it to grab attention and coverage.

It's no longer just about words. Visuals are also crucial to press releases.

Think about how you can help the journalist tell the story and present a compelling package. Could you include images and videos?

An audio clip of your CEO or subject matter expert discussing the topic could help bring the press release to life (and help show journalists you have credible and compelling spokespeople ready for interview).

Remember that data we spoke about earlier? Could you supply it through eye-catching infographics?

This type of content, which makes it easier for journalists, could be the difference between them covering your story or moving on to the next press release in their inbox.

One note of caution here is that you don't want to send huge files that clog up mailboxes. So, consider making these assets available through links and mentioning it in the notes to the editor section at the bottom of your press release.



NOTES TO EDITORS

This is the third and final stage of the pyramid and the part where you can include background information about your organisation.

You will sometimes hear it referred to as the boilerplate.

It's also the place to include your contact details.

If you have the attention of journalists, make sure it is easy for them to get in touch with you for more detail. And to organise media interviews – we can help ensure your spokespeople are best prepared for the media interview opportunities that come your way.

Also, ensure the comms team and the appropriate spokespeople are available when the press release goes out.

Journalists will quickly get frustrated and lose interest if they can't get hold of the person who is supposed to answer their questions.



SHOULD YOU INCLUDE AN EMBARGO?

There's lots of debate and different views on the role of embargoes in the modern press release. And there are still plenty of press releases with 'embargo' plastered across the top.

But are they needed, and do they work in the digital age and the era of 24-hour news?

Embargoes hark back to an age when a press release could be sent anytime and would not appear until the next day's newspapers were printed.

In the modern world of instant communication, why not just wait until you are ready for the story to go out?

Embargoes are basically an agreement based on trust. Putting the word 'embargo' at the top doesn't mean the recipients have to agree to it.

So, there is a risk that while some journalists may follow the embargo instructions, others will not. It not only disadvantages the reporters who follow it, but it makes the whole thing pointless. We discussed the issue during a masterclass for members of our Media Team Academy – our learning and development programme for comms and media professionals.

And one of our expert journalist tutors said: "Everyone breaks embargoes. "The internet is enormous, and there have been many times when I have respected an embargo, Googled it and then found the story is everywhere."

But that doesn't mean you can't approach your crucial contacts and let them know a press release will be coming in the next few days that you think will interest their audience.



WHAT ABOUT EXCLUSIVES?

We know journalists love exclusive stories.

But should you issue your press release as an exclusive?

There are a few things to consider.

Sending something as an exclusive may help capture the attention of your target media outlet.

But there is no guarantee they will use it.

If they use it, you could miss out on other media coverage. And you may also alienate other journalists you want to work with in future.

A bit like what we said about embargoes, there is also cynicism about whether anything can be exclusive in the modern world.

Ultimately, the answer to the exclusive question is whether you would be happy with that one piece of coverage – even if it is high-profile – or if you would prefer more widespread coverage.



DON'T FORGET TO PROOFREAD

It would be a shame if all your hard work was undermined by frustrating and avoidable errors.

It could also harm your chances of securing coverage.

Spend time proofreading your press release.

Here are some tips from our [writing skills courses](#) to help you proofread properly.

1. Leave a gap between writing and proofing. You will spot many more mistakes. Have a cup of tea, tackle the next thing on your 'to-do' list, or make that phone call you've been putting off before you start to check your work.

2. When you read your work, you can become blind to your mistakes as the brain automatically corrects wrong words inside sentences. One way to tackle this problem is to read your copy backwards, word by word.

3. Another good way of avoiding the automatic correction problem is to read your work aloud. If you stumble over your words and struggle for breath, you must simplify and rework your sentences.

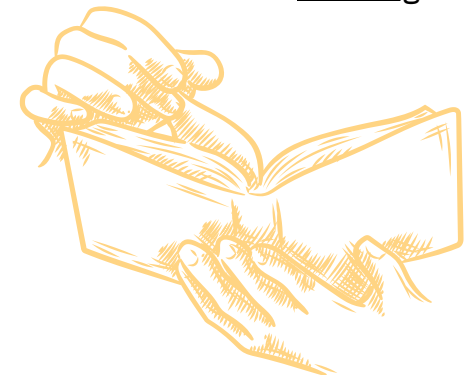
4. Print a copy of your press release – people read differently on screen and paper.

5. If you can't print it out, change the font and size of your text. Making it look different will help you to identify the errors.

6. Once you are happy with your press release, ensure someone else proofs it before it goes live. Another pair of eyes will invariably spot something you have missed.

A mistake could even lead to damaging coverage. Ride-hailing company Lyft was accused of making a \$2 billion typo after an error in a press release suggested it expected profit margins to increase at a rate far higher than was real.

You can read more about the fallout from that in [this blog](#).



GREAT EXPECTATIONS?

Your press release is ready to go.

You should always aim high.

But before you press send, you must set realistic goals about the coverage you hope to achieve.

Be honest, is it a national story? Or is it more realistically a good regional story?

Is it a story you could imagine TV or radio covering?

If the announcement is niche and technical, are you likely to get interest beyond trade media?

These questions – and honest answers – will help you consider where you should send the release, if it has been a success and whether you see a return on your time and effort invested.



GET MORE MILEAGE FROM YOUR PRESS RELEASES

Crafting a good press release takes time and effort.

So, isn't it time you secured more value from that investment?

Your press release includes valuable content you can repurpose to increase your reach and visibility.

You can share snippets on your social media channels.

You could turn part of it into a blog for your website. Or a video.

How about a podcast? Sit down with your CEO or industry expert and interview them about the topic (we can help with all aspects of podcast production if you need a hand).

If you've got a press release that has proved successful, repurpose it as a template for future announcements.



WHAT ELSE?

1. Focus on the human element of your story. Journalists – and their audience – love stories about people.
2. Ensure you have spokespeople available for interviews when the press release goes out.
3. Avoid a lengthy sign-off process – it can delay release and strip quotes of the vital human element.
4. Send your press release in the body of the email – time-pressed journalists may not open attachments.
5. Most organisations send press releases to newspapers, trade publications, radio stations and TV channels. Consider adding relevant podcasters, influencers and bloggers to your press release mailing list.
6. Don't just send. Publish press releases on your website and create a section where journalists can go for regular updates.
7. Different media outlets have different lead times. Newspapers, radio and TV are predominantly instant. But trade publications and magazines can be targeted weeks and months in advance.



PITCH

It's time to release your release.

Press send and hope for the best?

You can do better than that, even if the advice on when to send is plentiful and can feel a little confusing at times.

You can find articles telling you to avoid sending at the start and end of the week.

Research has shown press releases sent on a Thursday typically perform better.

The theory is that journalists are approaching the end of the week, have covered their most pressing stories and finally have a chance to look at that bulging inbox.

But, according to Meltwater, more than half of journalists don't care what day they are pitched stories.

What seems clearer is that journalists want to receive press releases in the morning as they plan their day.

Muck Rack's State of Journalism 2024 report says 44 per cent of journalists want to receive pitches before noon.

And one of our expert journalist tutors said they want to receive them before 9am so they can take them to the morning meeting.

It is much better to be too early than too late, particularly if your press release relates to something already in the news.

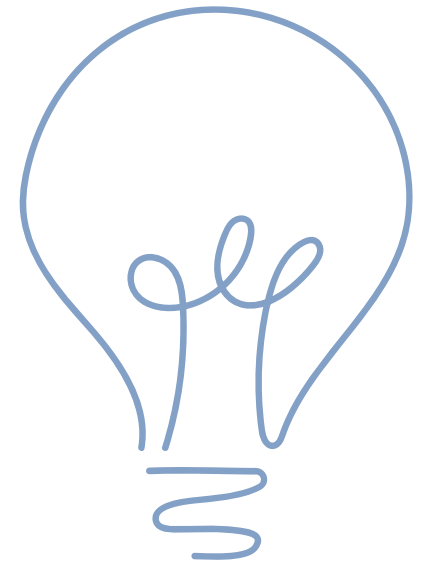
Ultimately, the more press releases you send, the better you will get to know the inboxes of your target journalists. And you will develop an understanding of when works best for your press releases.

It could be you gain more coverage sending on weekends when the news cupboard is often bare.



TOP PITCHING TIPS

- **Do your homework** – pitch to the journalist covering your industry
- **Short and sweet** – try to keep your pitch email to around four sentences that explain the story and why it matters
- **Don't sell** – if the story is newsworthy, journalists will be interested
- **Make it personal** – show why you think the story is relevant to them and their audience
- **Stand out** – avoid words like 'press release' or 'pitch' in your subject line
- **Simple** – avoid jargon and vagueness



THE FOLLOW UP

We are often asked about follow-ups and how quickly and often you should do it. The answer is that most journalists don't mind a small amount of pitch and press release follow-up activity.

But you must be careful with the timing – don't go too early or too late. You should wait between 24 and 48 hours.

And a week before the second follow-up.

If that doesn't succeed, leave it there – more than two follow-ups tend to annoy journalists.

Research from **Muck Rack** revealed 90 per cent of journalists were happy to receive a follow-up email.

But those numbers quickly fall as the follow-ups increase – 31 per cent said two follow-up emails were acceptable, and just five per cent were happy to receive three.

Only 10 per cent said they did not want to receive a follow-up.

Journalists tend to prefer follow-ups by email. But, if you have built a good relationship with them, you could also consider WhatsApp, text or a good old fashioned phone call.



DON'T TAKE REJECTION PERSONALLY

Not every pitch will result in a story and extensive coverage.

And there can be many reasons why you don't achieve the coverage you want. Don't take the silence or 'no' personally.

It could be as simple as being unlucky with timing, as a breaking major news story dominates the agenda. News can be unpredictable.

Whatever the reason, don't become too disheartened. Or give up.

See what you can learn and improve on from the experience for your next announcement. It may take a few attempts to gain the media coverage you want.

And don't forget, you can still get value from the rejected release by repurposing it as other forms of content.



WHO DOES IT WELL?

There are many, many press releases published every day.

And it can be tricky to find one to highlight.

But one that grabbed our attention came from The Jockey Club as it announced major changes to the Grand National.

The high-profile race was reduced to a maximum of 34 runners from 40 as part of measures designed to improve safety.

The move followed three equine fatalities across the three-day Aintree meeting in 2023.

At more than 2,600 words, the press release goes against the brevity advice we included in this eBook. And the headline only works because the race is so high profile.

But that aside, there was a lot to like about it.

The race changes were clearly articulated.

And there were quotes from seven different sources (partly explaining the size of the press release).

This included its chief executive, the person who led a review of the race, the trainer of the 2023 Grand National winner, the regulatory authority of the sport, a former jockey who rode two winners in the race and even the RSPCA – all bringing third-party validation to the story.

And the quotes all sound natural and human – they had not been stripped of meaning or personality by what was surely a lengthy approval process.

Here's what Ruby Walsh, a leading jockey turned pundit, said: "The Grand National is the showcase event for a sport I love dearly. It's iconic and I don't think you can overstate how important the Grand National is – it's a Saturday in April when non-racing people watch our sport.

"People enjoy it and it's up to us in racing to make sure that they continue to enjoy it.

"I think these changes represent the evolution of the Grand National. The world is ever-changing and the Grand National and indeed horseracing, like any other sport, has to be prepared to change."

The proof these quotes used in the press release offer value comes in the fact they were carried in the resulting media coverage. And that coverage was broadly positive or at least neutral - not a bad outcome for a tricky subject.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Press releases may not sound sexy or exciting in the modern digital world.

But they remain an integral part of gaining positive media coverage.

We know journalists want them – the leading journalists who deliver our training always talk about their importance.

And being able to write a great release and pitch remains an essential comms skill.

Make your press releases stand out from the competition and noise – and get the coverage your organisation deserves - by following our tips and thinking more like a journalist.

ABOUT MEDIA FIRST

We've been delivering communication training for around 40 years.

This includes working with 40 of the FTSE 100, public relations companies, charities, public sector organisations and businesses of all sizes.

Do you feel you would benefit from a bit more support putting your press releases together, identifying potential stories, pitching ideas to journalists, or having confident spokespeople available to tell your stories when you have captured the interest of journalists?

Our current working journalists are perfectly placed to guide you through everything you need to know about creating impactful press releases and pitches.

And they will ensure your spokespeople have the media skills needed to make the most of the opportunity when you grab the attention of journalists.

[Chat with our account managers](#) about your communication needs.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Adam Fisher is an experienced comms, media management and PR professional and a former journalist.

As Media First's content editor, he regularly shares insight and advice on media interviews, crisis communication, presentation skills and social media in our blogs.

He's also written eBooks and guides on preparing for media interviews, developing presentation skills and planning for crises.

Adam is also part of the Media First training team.

