



Community & Voluntary Service

Mid and North Bedfordshire

How to Write a Press Release

1: Introduction

By definition a press release is simply a statement prepared for distribution to the media. The purpose of a press release is to give journalists information that is useful, accurate and interesting.

A press release is probably the simplest and cheapest way of getting news coverage for your organisation. Every day newsrooms are inundated with press releases some good, some bad, some boring and some completely irrelevant. So what makes a good press release? You are going to need something that grabs the journalist's attention and is relevant to their target group.

2: Where to begin

You are going to need a story to write. It needs to be a worthwhile read and not just nonsense to get your organisation in the paper. It will need to be typed up so it is easy to read, ideally on headed paper with a logo if you have one. It is ideal to have a list of newspapers to send the story to. You will also need to provide two contact numbers so the journalist can get back to you in a hurry if need be.

3: The story

What you need to remember is you are not writing the article how you would like it to be printed, you are writing the article to attract the attention of the journalist. So don't squeeze a lot of information into what you think is the right amount for a newspaper, write all the details they need to know then they can choose what they put in and what they leave out.

Here are some things that will catch their eye:

- A catchy headline/strap line will highlight the topic of your press release
- Pick a topic (see some ideas below)
- Once you've chosen your subject stick to it! Don't go on about everything in one press release. If there are other things you wish to raise it can be done in a separate release.

Whether a press release is entered in the paper or on a radio or TV show can depend a lot on how it is presented to the journalist. If it is presented on scruffy paper, with typing errors and with no clear idea who it is who submitted the piece, the journalist will not take the time to read it.

4: Logos and headers

- Your organisation's logo should appear in the top right hand corner of your press release
- Banners and logos can go across the top of the page and will help highlight your organisation's brand image
- Headers should appear at the top of your press release bearing the name of your organisation

5: Possible stories

There are hundreds of stories that you could release ranging from a charity event, a review of a recent event, a request for volunteers, an open day or how to win a competition. Once you've chosen your subject you must remember to include:

- **Who** - Who are you?
- **What** - What is going on?
- **Where** - Where is it happening?
- **Why** - Why is it happening?
- **When** - The date and time of the event.
- **Contact details** - How to get in touch or who to contact if you want to take part.

6: Overall character and structure of the press release

- **Content** – ensure that the release is grammatically correct and doesn't contain any spelling mistakes, errors, and sources are quoted correctly
- **Concise** – keep it punchy and don't use unnecessary elaborate language
- **Factual present** - information that is true, correct and doesn't embellish anything that is to be communicated
- **Objectivity** – virtually impossible to do, but refrain from using over hyped quotes from sources as they will be presented as being too biased
- **Timing** - the press release may not be topical, but it may be able to incorporate the release with a more recent news event

7: Timing

A good press release can be a failure if it is released at the wrong time. You need to take into consideration:

- When was your group last in that particular newspaper or announced on a particular show § If you are planning an event you will need to send the release at least three weeks to a month in advance
- Think about what else is going to be in the paper e.g. local elections, general elections. There are certain times of the year when it is worth releasing a story and other times when maybe it is best to hold onto it.
- Watch out for deadlines and always leave room for flexibility

8: Photos

A good photo can create a safety net between your interesting story and the rubbish bin. Newsrooms are always on the lookout for good photos so it might be worth including one. Don't forget don't send a photo to a radio station it sounds crazy but it happens!

9: Further help

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The Media Trust - helping charities communicate - www.mediatrust.org

Community Newswire - is a free service run by the Media Trust and The Press Association, the national news agency of Britain and Ireland, to help community and voluntary groups gain coverage in the media - www.communitynewswire.org

Reference Books:

- **The DIY Guide to Public Relations for Charities, Voluntary Organisations and Community Groups** – Moi Ali – www.dsc.org.uk - £16.95
- **Promoting Your Cause** – Karen Gilchrist – www.dsc.org.uk - £14.95

CVS – Mid & North Beds have some of the aforementioned books in our reference library & these can be loaned to CVS members

See Other Related CVS – Mid & North Beds Information Sheets:

- **How to Market your Group Effectively**
- **How to Create Effective Publicity Materials**

This is one in a series of fact sheets produced by CVS – Mid & North Beds, on subjects of interest to voluntary and community groups. It is intended for guidance only and is not a comprehensive statement of the law.