eBOOK

New School Press Release Tactics

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ENGAGE OPPORTUNITY EVERYWHERE
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Press Release Readership & Tactics ........................................ PAGE 3
- Social Amplification ............................................................. PAGE 9
- Aligning Content & Outcomes .............................................. PAGE 13
- Storytelling Tactics ............................................................. PAGE 19
- Driving Visibility ................................................................. PAGE 28
- Key Takeaways ...................................................................... PAGE 33
PRESS RELEASE READERSHIP & TACTICS
Are press releases dead? Our answer is an unequivocal “NO!”

According to PR Newswire’s Web analytics, the press releases on our Web site were read almost 42 million times in 2012.
SO WHO ACTUALLY READS PRESS RELEASES THESE DAYS? THE ANSWERS MAY SURPRISE YOU.

Certainly, journalists and bloggers are still an important audience for press releases. In fact, since many are producing and curating content for a variety of mediums, this translates into a nearly insatiable demand for relevant content about the subject matter they’re covering. Press releases are credible communications of record from companies and are a legitimate source of information that can be shared, liked, commented upon, tweeted, pinned and written about.

However we also need to think about people other than journalists and bloggers when it comes to the audience for press releases. According to research PR Newswire did with Forrester, a significant number of potential buyers and consumers read press releases too. In fact, 15% of PRNewswire.com’s Web site traffic is comprised of potential buyers.
More evidence of the popularity of press releases can easily be seen on social networks.

A simple search for “PRNewswire” on Twitter reveals the cascade of tweets referencing press releases that went out over the wire.

In an environment like today where information is so eagerly consumed and shared and literal currency is important, a press release is a fresh piece of information that’s easy to share with relevant audiences.

Press releases are continually being shared by audiences in social media.

This screenshot shows just one minute worth of tweeted press releases. Click here to see the latest live search results.

Source: https://twitter.com/search/realtime?q=prnewswire
The formula for a successful press release has changed, evolving with the preferences of the audience and the emergence of social networking.

**PRESS RELEASES:**

more multimedia = even more views

Our data shows that PR Newswire’s customers’ press releases with multimedia assets – such as photos, videos and downloadable files – can help garner up to 9.7 times more views than text-only releases.

Simply put, the rules that apply to content publication on the Web also apply to press releases. There’s a lot of competition for attention out there today, and content that’s boring is overlooked, no matter how well it’s edited or optimized. The content itself has to be interesting and useful to the audience in order to provide utility for the brand.

We know, for example, that press releases that include multimedia generate up to almost 10 times more views than their plain-text brethren.
CONTENT ASIDE, FORMAT MATTERS TOO

Long blocks of unrelenting text simply aren’t optimized for human readers—they don’t capture the eye and help readers move down the page. Text-heavy pages have another limitation: they don’t encourage the social sharing that can exponentially expand the audience for a message.

Writers should be thinking about how content will be read on mobile devices, scanned by reporters on deadline or accessed through social networks. Best practices include:

- Short, tweetable headlines
- Using bulleted or numbered lists
- Breaking up text with subheads

Taking the time to write a perfectly tweetable headline, break up text with bulleted lists and bold sub-heads, embed paths to more information and use multimedia to capture (and hold) more reader interest will pay dividends in terms of the effectiveness of your press releases and their utility for your brand.

RELATED INFORMATION: PR Newswire’s Tactical Guide to Formatting Press Releases
SOCIAL AMPLIFICATION
HEADLINE HASHTAGS AND OTHER TWEETABLE PRESS RELEASE TIPS

A post on the Forbes CIO network titled “#Accounting: Why Finance Teams Need to Get Social” garnered an unusual amount of traffic when compared to other posts on that channel. With a current tally of more than 430,000 reads, this particular post is a real outlier. A quick scan of other posts on the site suggests that reader tallies in the low four figures are the norm.

This anomaly was spotted by Lou Hoffman of the Hoffman Agency, and he highlighted it in a blog post titled, “The Role of the Hashtag in a Forbes Headline Attracting Over 400K Views.”

“The one element that makes this Forbes post different from other executive byliners lies in the headline and the use of the hashtag #Accounting,” he noted in his blog post.

According to HubSpot’s new LinkTally tool, that article was shared 1,200 times on social networks. And, as illustrated in Hoffman’s blog post, Google is differentiating between the search terms “#accounting” and “accounting.” While we are not willing to ascribe the success of this post on Forbes entirely to the presence of the hashtag in the headline – after all, it is a well-written discussion of a timely topic – we do think that the headline format had something to do with the article’s success.
There’s certainly no doubt that press releases are important grist for Twitter’s information mill. A look at the live search results for “PRNewswire” on Twitter shows that people are tweeting the press releases we issue multiple times per minute. *(See screenshot on page 6)*

If you’re writing press releases, it’s a good idea to consider – and encourage – the Twitter audience.

- Try using a relevant and popular hashtag in a tweet-ready headline – keep it to about 100 characters and make it interesting.

- That obligatory quote? Craft it for Twitter by dropping the hyperbole and editing it down into a 100 character statement that makes a key point.

- Encourage tweeting by including the Twitter handle of anyone you quote in the press release.
WHY 100 CHARACTERS?
I THOUGHT TWEETS WERE 140 CHARACTERS?

While you can put as many as 140 characters into a tweet, there are a few reasons why limiting tweets to 100 characters (or even less) is a good idea.

- If you’re adding a URL to your tweet, allow 20 characters for Twitter’s URL shortener. All URLs on Twitter are converted to Twitter URLs automatically.

- You’ll also want to leave space for other people’s comments and Twitter handles, to encourage re-tweets.

- Research by PR Newswire shows that press releases with long headlines (longer than 140 characters) experience a significant drop in online views, so writing a Twitter-friendly headline can help boost overall results.

Source: Hubspot PR Newswire
ALIGNING CONTENT & OUTCOMES
“User experience design” (or “UXD” if you want to look cool) is a hot topic these days in digital design and SEO circles, and for reasons that go far beyond aesthetics. A Web site with a good user experience – one that is easy for people to navigate and delivers what they’re looking for – provides a good experience for site visitors and generates the sort of positive signals that search engines value. As a result, user experience has a direct effect on a Web site’s search rankings and conversion rate.

The Rx for better press release results?

Design press releases to enable the readers’ objectives.

How does this relate to writing press releases?

As we’re drafting our press releases (or, for that matter, any other content intended for digital publication) we should be thinking about what exactly we want our readers to do, and then structure the content accordingly.
DESIGNING PRESS RELEASES FOR READERS

We can design press releases and other content to encourage readers to move forward and take the action we’re promoting by incorporating some ideas from the UXD crowd.

Here are a few tips.

1. IDENTIFY THE SPECIFIC OUTCOME YOU WANT YOUR PRIMARY AUDIENCE TO TAKE.

   In most cases, you’ll want other constituents to read the story, too. But trying to serve all audiences in one message is tough to do. Focus the content on one audience, and one outcome, such as getting industry media and bloggers to write a particular story, generating social shares of an image or getting readers to click on a specific link.
2. **FOCUS THE CONTENT OF EVERY PARAGRAPH ON LEADING THE READER TO THAT OUTCOME.**

If your writing starts to veer from the path, so will your reader. Stay focused on the key message. Other messages will need their own separate vehicles, whether that means another press release or something else, such as a blog post or inclusion in a customer newsletter.

3. **STRUCTURE THE CONTENT TO ENABLE THE READER TO GET TO THE DESIRED OUTCOME.**

It’s important to assume that most readers do not read all the way through a piece of content, unless it is meeting their needs and hooking their interest every single step of the way. This means that in addition to keeping the message focused, you need to put links where people will click them – such as right after the first paragraph, rather than at the very end of the copy where they could be easily overlooked. Weave links and access to supporting information throughout the content.
In a recent PR Newswire-hosted webinar, Jason Khoury, Director of Communications at Jive Software, Inc. shared a couple of examples showing how he tailors their releases to drive specific desired outcomes.

**EXAMPLE 1:**
In a release announcing a new app, readers are encouraged to download the app through a link that is prominently featured below the first paragraph.
EXAMPLE 2: Replacing generic language with specific terms (e.g. iPad, iPhone and Android apps) in the press release headline enabled Jive Software, Inc. to leverage search terms to attract more qualified interest. As a result, traffic to the web pages linked within this release grew by more than 200%.
STORYTELLING TACTICS
BUILDING STORYTELLING TACTICS INTO PRESS RELEASES

As writers, we need to think first about what our readers want to read and accomplish, rather than the messages our organizations want to convey. Press releases should march the reader straight through the key points of the story and wrap up with an inevitable conclusion. Just as marketers strive to prevent their sales funnels from leaking, and webmasters focus on increasing the time visitors spend on the site, writers need to be thinking about maintaining reader attention as they author content.

Assuming that you need to stick to dry language and a certain format when drafting a press release can limit the appeal (and ultimately the success) of your message. Press releases have the potential to reach huge audiences, and constituents of every stripe.
“We’re kind of stuck on making an old format meet a new purpose,” notes **Jeff Domansky**, CEO of Peak Communications and author of the popular public relations blog, **The PR Coach**. “The first social press release format came out seven years ago, but we’re not using it. People are falling back on the old format, and complaining that it doesn’t work.”

The majority of press releases issued today are still text-only, and their authors are missing out on opportunities to build engagement with and social amplification of their messages.
So what does work in crafting messages today? Building storytelling into the mix.

In addition to building understanding, framing messages in the context of a story makes them relatable and memorable. Stories provide contextual glue that makes key messages stick.

“Write a good story that communicates all the salient information you need to get out there, and do it in an interesting way,” suggests Steve Farnsworth, chief strategist at Jolt Digital Marketing, and publisher of the widely-read Steveology blog. “Stories are how we understand things.”

“You can tell the story, and press releases are a great way to do it,” says Farnsworth. “Press releases should be journalistic, not formulaic. Trustworthy content has a balanced point of view. It asks and answers the right questions. It doesn’t love itself. It tries to inform and educate.”

“Stories are how we understand things.”
ADDING NARRATIVE ELEMENTS TO YOUR PRESS RELEASES

Building a story into a message as succinct as a press release can be challenging. The key is to add narrative elements to your press release, such as:

- A **QUOTE** from the member of the product development team (instead of a canned exec quote) discussing the genesis of the product, and problem it solves or the opportunity it creates

- A **VIDEO CLIP** of a customer describing a successful outcome or demonstrating the utility of a product

- An **ACCOUNT** from an employee on the service side of the business, describing decreases in support requests or other indications of customer happiness

- An **INFOGRAPHIC** illustrating potential savings or efficiencies that could accrue over time
But storytelling can be a tough sell to executives, who may be focused more on promoting the brand than serving the audience. Hoffman is waging an ongoing war against “corporate drivel.” He believes that a good story can fit strategically within the PR message, as long as the message answers two questions:

- Does the content deliver the “frame” that today’s journalists need to write a story?
- Does the content resonate with the target audience when reaching out to customers/prospects directly?

notes Lou Hoffman, CEO of the Hoffman Agency, a leading Silicon Valley PR firm and author of the Ishmael’s Corner blog, where storytelling is a common theme.
THE STORYTELLING ARC

Putting the audience in front of the brand is one challenge when it comes to writing more engaging copy. Figuring out how to build the story into the content — especially when you’re drafting a press release — can also be difficult at first. But the classic storytelling arc, in which the scene is set, the conflict arises and is resolved in the climax, which then leads to the denouement, is a structure that works for a press release, too.

Borrowing from Hoffman’s post on storytelling techniques, this is our simplified vision of how the storytelling arc structure can work for press releases.
Framing the message in the context of the experience you would expect your audience to encounter if they bought your product/used your service/read your book/attended your event/etc., the storytelling arc structure makes a lot of sense.

To the point of the aforementioned war on drivel, it also leaves precious little space for, shall we say, the wandering narrative that folks up and down the approval chain are tempted to stick into your press release.
“LOOK AT THE RELEASE AS THE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF ANY NEWSWORTHY THINGS THAT COMES OUT.


suggests Eddy Badrina, co-founder and chief strategy officer at BuzzShift, a digital strategy agency.

Though it’s been around for decades, the press release is ripe for a re-think.

There’s no reason for any message we issue to be described as boring, dull or dead. Taking pages from the storytellers’ playbook will help keep your messages lively, relatable ... and effective.
DRIVING VISIBILITY
A lot of search engine optimization professionals are incorporating PR tactics into their optimization strategies these days, and there’s a very good reason for this trend: the search engines are placing premiums on authentic earned media.

The very nature of earned media has evolved, however. In addition to mainstream media pick up, earned media credibility also occurs when content generates social shares and develops high-quality Web site traffic.

So, as we are writing press releases and other content intended for online publication, it’s a good idea to be thinking about how to encourage social sharing and to keep readers on the Web page posting your content. And to achieve these objectives, first and foremost, it’s crucial to attract readers that are truly interested in the message topic.
OUTCOMES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO VISIBILITY

This means we need to take a critical look at the press releases and other content we’re publishing, with an eye toward garnering reader attention, holding it on the page, and inspiring some sort of action such as social sharing or clicking through on links we serve.

These types of outcomes aren’t traditionally found among the intended outcomes of a campaign, but these are the sort of things the digital marketing crowd pays close attention to, because of the importance of these factors to everything from search engine rank and social buzz to lead generation and conversion rate.

And let’s face it, if we fail to grab reader attention, hold it and inspire the reader to take some sort of positive action, the press releases we send out and the blog posts we publish won’t be seen. Content that is overlooked by readers does not generate any of the positive signals that search engines are looking for that ultimately increase the visibility of a message, and also improve the rank of the corresponding Web site.
FORGET OPTIMIZATION: FOCUS ON THE AUDIENCE

What is coming next may surprise you. Instead of picking apart the structural mechanics of the press release, it’s important to spend a little time thinking about the overall message and the focus. We have to do a better job of presenting content in our readers’ context, not within the brand’s messaging framework.

How do you build that audience context into messaging? A good way to start is by answering the following questions pertaining to the announcement you’re drafting:

- What are the problems your readers want to solve?
- How can you convey that you’re planning to improve their lives or make it easier for them to do their jobs better?

These are the sorts of questions we need to be asking ourselves as we start to build our message strategies. If we fail to incorporate the audience’s point of view into our messaging, our brands are going to feel out-of-touch, inaccessible and uninteresting.
TIGHTENING THE SCREWS ON MESSAGE RELEVANCE

Another problem we often see in press releases is jumbled messaging, with angles and themes piled haphazardly on top of one another.

The news release may start off talking about a partnership or a new product, for example, but then all of a sudden it veers off into a discussion of business strategy, a new hire or the upcoming product pipeline. It starts to read like the script of a late-night infomercial: “But wait! There’s more!”

THE POINT
Key Takeaways

1. Illustrating messages with multimedia elements such as a video or image will improve results, making the content more easily discovered, and more engaging for the audience once they find it.

2. Make sure your content is structured for easy reading on a small screen. Short headlines, tight writing and bullet points make it easy for readers to scan your messages on mobile devices.

3. Encourage social sharing of your press release at every turn. Embed click-to-tweet links, write a short and perfectly tweetable headline, draw attention to crunchy facts with paragraph headers in bold text.

4. Structure the content to support the primary outcome you’re promoting, whether the call to action is an app download, webinar registration or a link serving up additional information. Make links to these types of actions easily found – don’t bury them at the bottom of the copy.

5. Put your audience first. All content – including press releases – should be first and foremost interesting and useful to your audience.
Additional Resources

- PUBLIC RELATIONS & SEO: BETTER TOGETHER
  [link](http://www.slideshare.net/prnewswire/how-to-write-press-releases-that-can-be-found-and-shared-online)

- PR NEWSWIRE’S BEYOND PR BLOG: “SEO” TAG ROUND-UP
  [link](http://blog.prnewswire.com/tag/seo/)

- PR NEWSWIRE’S TACTICAL GUIDE TO FORMATTING PRESS RELEASES
  [link](http://promotions.prnewswire.com/LP_TacticalGuide-Anatomy_PDF_BeyondPR_20130723_JH.html)
How are you using multimedia to tell your story?

LET US HELP YOU SHARE YOUR STORY

**Photo or Video Release**
Add a single asset such as an image (photo, logo, infographic) or a video to your release

**Flex Release**
Add photos, video, audio and PDF files to your release

**Multimedia News Release**
Add photos, videos, audio, PDF files and more to your message with a dedicated, branded landing page

**ARC Engagement Platform**
Add photos, videos, audio, PDF files and more to a dynamic player on a fully-customizable landing page

LEARN MORE ABOUT HOW TO CREATE A MULTIMEDIA RELEASE >
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Sarah is a frequent and well received speaker on the subjects of social media, content marketing and PR measurement. A graduate of Miami University in Oxford, OH, Sarah also earned an MBA from Notre Dame.
ABOUT PR NEWSWIRE

PR Newswire (www.prnewswire.com) is the premier global provider of multimedia platforms and solutions that enable marketers, corporate communicators, sustainability officers, public affairs and investor relations officers to leverage content to engage with all their key audiences.

Having pioneered the commercial news distribution industry 59 years ago, PR Newswire today provides end-to-end solutions to produce, optimize and target content – from rich media to online video to multimedia – and then distribute content and measure results across traditional, digital, social, search and mobile channels. Combining the world’s largest multi-channel, multi-cultural content distribution and optimization network with comprehensive workflow tools and platforms, PR Newswire enables the world’s enterprises to engage opportunity everywhere it exists. PR Newswire serves tens of thousands of clients from offices in the Americas, Europe, Middle East, Africa and the Asia-Pacific region, and is a UBM plc. company.