

HOW TO WRITE PRESS RELEASES AND EMAIL PITCHES FOR LOCAL REPORTERS



“Press releases are different from other documents because they use what’s called an inverted pyramid. That means the most interesting news comes first, followed by the background.”

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A press release is a written document that you send to media with the aim of enticing them to produce their own story about the contents.

They are written in the same format as the stories you see in newspapers.

Do you need them?

Press releases can help your chances of getting attention from the local reporter. If written well, the reporter can almost just cut and paste them into the newspaper. This sometimes happens, but usually they will create their own story and possibly contact you for more information.

Having said that, often a quick email pitch is

all you need. My advice is to write the press release if you have the time, or it’s a major issue you really want covered by local media. But otherwise stick to an email pitch. The last thing you want to do is avoid contacting the reporter at all.

If you do send an email pitch only, keep it brief. Sum up the idea in a few sentences and tell the reporter why you think it would benefit locals to see the story. Also make sure there is a news hook in the subject line to make sure the reporter opens it. We discussed news hooks in the issue before last.

Press Release formatting

You’ll find with a brief Internet search that press releases vary slightly in their format, but there are some essential things that are common to all effective ones.

Firstly, the headline and first paragraph have to include a news hook and sum up what the

press releases is about. This is vital because if this isn’t done, the reporter will stop reading. Preferably the headline would fit across one line and the first sentence would be no longer than 25 words.

Press releases are different from other documents because they use what’s called an inverted pyramid. That means the most interesting news comes first, followed by the background.

Paragraphs need to be short and punchy, while the entire release should be limited to one page if possible. They are also written in third person, but need at least two interesting direct quotes from someone. These will appear between speech marks.

The final thing is the importance of contact information. This should appear at the bottom of the release and include both an email address, website address and phone number. The best number to give is a cell phone because you want to be available to the reporter. If you won’t be available, don’t put the release out until you are.

Other important points

Unless the reporter asks otherwise, paste the contents of your press release into the body of your email under your pitch. Media outlets don’t like opening attachment for fear of viruses.

Press releases are simple to write, but along with my instructions here, you are best to search online for some actual examples. Government websites usually publish good ones, but there’s a huge range in quality across the web.

Franchisees have major opportunities to generate publicity in local media, as discussed in earlier columns. It grows profiles, reputations and bottom lines without costing a cent. But only those who take action reap all these benefits.

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