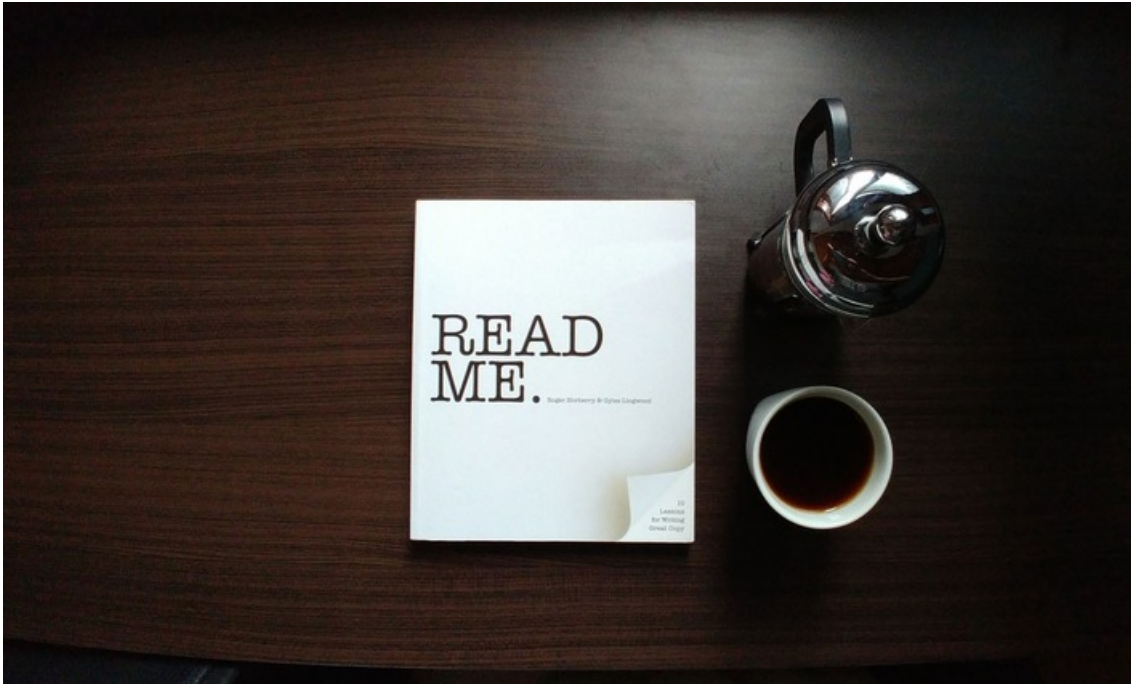


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BLOGPOST Writing a press release: Basics, Objectives, Buildup and Checklist



Press releases are an important research source for media professionals. But they need to meet certain criteria if they are going to be seen and taken seriously by journalists. This article explains the most important fundamentals of this central instrument for successful media work, showing you step-by-step how to write a professional press release.

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Definition and differences from other formats

Press releases are a central communication tool companies and organisations use to inform media professionals about events, products and other news. Often referred to as press releases, press information or press statements, they are commonly called 'media releases' or 'media dispatches' in Switzerland. Press releases reach out to journalists as the primary target group and they decide whether the topic is editorially relevant and will receive news coverage.

In terms of structure and style, press releases are closely based on journalistic news. It summarises the most important facts about a specific occasion by answering the most important Wh-questions and is characterised by factual, neutral and informative language. Press releases differ here from other, often subjective or evaluative formats such as commentaries, progress reports, reviews, news you can use and behind-the-scenes stories.

Objectives of a press release

The primary goal of a press release is to generate public attention and get noticed. Journalists act here as multipliers. Ideally, a release should arouse the interest of media professionals, lead them to take a look at the story and report on it in the media. The purpose behind getting editorial coverage is to influence public perception of a company, organisation or public figure in a positive direction.

Accordingly, press releases are intended first to raise awareness, depending on the occasion, about a company, a product, a service or a person. Yet they can seek to bring other stakeholder relevant topics to the forefront, such as positioning on certain political, economic or social developments.

Companies can then with the help of press releases build up, improve or change their reputation and public image. They help strengthen the bond of trust between companies and their customers, service providers, partners and other stakeholders. Press releases can also send a 'signal' to the competition and increase a company's own visibility among competitors. Likewise, they can work to underpin the company's expertise in a sector. Finally, a press release is an important tool in a crisis and in crisis communication.

Targeting your press release

What makes press releases special is that they always address two target groups. The primary recipients are journalists. But media recipients are also targeted. Therefore, it is critical to ask beforehand whether the information the press release provides has true added value for the media professionals it is addressing as the target group. It is equally important to know how journalists work and what their requirements for press material are.

For press work to be successful in the long term, it is essential to know the most important media in your own sector and which editors handle which topics. The scatter-gun approach – distributing press material broadly across as many editorial offices as possible – may seem simpler at first glance, but editors tend in the medium term to look less seriously upon it and you lose credibility. In the worst case, you scare away journalists who could play a major role elsewhere.

You should also develop an understanding of timing to your target media. Depending on the medium, editorial conferences are held every day, once a week or once a month, and usually in the morning (although sometimes there will be another conference in the afternoon): This is the time when topics for the next issue or upcoming days and weeks are determined.

In print media, journalists also work to so-called 'editorial deadlines': These are the deadlines for completing what will be contributed to the next edition. While for daily media it is every day and for weeklies usually 2-5 days before the publication date, the editorial deadline for trade publications published only every 6-8 weeks, will usually be 1-2 weeks prior to the publication date. Online media also often work with editorial deadlines, even though they can in principle publish articles more flexibly. For press releases with a strong topical reference, it is therefore essential to pay attention to the right timing and to consider the lead times in the editorial offices (see also ['Timing your press releases right'](#)).

Basically, editorial offices chronically lack time, due to various factors such as compressing the work to fill what little they have, meeting deadlines and the pressure to deliver. For your press release to be noticed by journalists, it should have what media professionals require in terms of content and form.

Relevant topics for press releases

The only press releases followed up by the media are those with recognisable news value and therefore added value for the target group. When journalists select topics for editorial reporting, they are guided by so-called 'news values'. These are: topicality, novelty or progress, proximity, meaningfulness, unexpectedness, and prominence. Press releases should meet at least one of these criteria and optimally several of them at once.

For what occasions or reasons do companies or organisations write press releases? Below is an overview of possible communication occasions for press releases that take into account news factors:

- Annual reports and corporate financial statements
- New customers won, major contracts
- Cooperation between companies
- Prizes and awards
- Participation in a (major) advertising campaign
- Corporate and service anniversaries
- Start-ups
- Jobs created and employer branding
- Exceptional investments (such as expansion or new construction, additional locations)
- Corporate events, trade fairs and road shows
- Surveys of sector-relevant topics

Structuring a press release

Besides content, form and language are key for getting a press release noticed by journalists and, in the best possible case, for them to read it. Remember: Because press releases are written for specific occasions, the focus should be on a single main topic. When you sit down to write a press release, be aware of what you want to communicate and whom it should be reaching.

Preparing a press release

Ask yourself these questions when you are preparing a press release: What is the central topic and the specific reason for writing this? What is the core message? Who do I want to reach and who are the target groups among the media and public?

A press release is always structured the same way, no matter what topic it covers. A press release is always composed of the following elements: headline or caption followed by a teaser, lead or first paragraph, further text, and a boilerplate or press contact.

Headline: Short, concise and to the point

The headline opens the door and is the most important component of any press release. The nature of the headline determines

whether people are going to read further or not. Since your press release is competing with countless others, readers need to understand at first glance what the story is going to be, while at the same time arousing their interest and curiosity so they read on.

A good headline is short, crisp and informative. It has to stand on its own and function without further elaboration. Headlines contain the press release's core message in an abbreviated form without distorting it.

Therefore, a quickly readable and understandable headline is styled like a news item in a journal. No judgements are made and it is written in clear, lively language. The headline is formulated with active verbs in the present tense and no cumbersome nouns.

Press releases are different from promotional advertisements. They should be factual, neutral and objective. The same holds true for the headline. Superlatives have no place in a press release. They will only scare readers away.

The optimal length of a headline should never exceed about 70 characters. This limit approximately equals the length of commonly set email subject lines. Therefore, don't put words like 'press release' or 'press information' in the actual subject or headline. That only consumes unnecessary space.

If the press release is going to appear on your company's website or be published on portals such as [Presseportal](#) or distribution services like [ots](#), you should also optimise the headline for search engines. For SEO, relevant keywords in the headline are particularly important. But length is also critical for Google and other engines because their search results display a maximum of 70 characters. Therefore, it is recommended to shorten the meta title for SEO accordingly, if necessary.

Teaser: answering the most important Wh-questions

The first paragraph of a press release, also called the lead or teaser, is the second most important component after the headline. This is where the message's core statements should be made briefly and succinctly. It answers the most important Wh-questions (who, what, when, where, how, why) in the lead. Be sure to order your sentences by the decreasing importance of the information relayed as press releases are hardly a thriller building up suspense to give the solution only at the very end. The beginning must immediately convey to readers the central message in an understandable way - and in the best case, arouse their interest to read on and learn more. The optimal length is between 3-5 sentences.

What are the Wh-questions?

- Who has done/wants to do something?
- What happened/should be happening?
- When did it happen/should it be happening?
- Where did it happen/should it be happening?
- How did it happen/will it be happening?
- Why did it happen/should it be happening?

Other paragraphs and quotes

The next (2-5) paragraphs answer less important Wh-questions and give additional background information and/or explanations. For good readability, divide the text into clear paragraphs. For longer texts and several aspects, it is advisable to work with subheadings.

This is where you can also insert quotes. Quotations are the only place in a press release where you can leave the neutral, factual style behind and make judgements. Quotes convey an opinion, intention or forecast. Always keep them short and meaningful with no empty phrases. Phrases like 'revolutionary products', 'high-profile personnel decisions' and 'multiple technological breakthroughs' should never be used in a quotation. In addition, always quote the most credible person from a professional point of view, such as top management on strategic issues or product management on product issues.

The correct order to quote is: '[...]', said (academic TITLE if applicable) FIRST NAME SURNAME, JOB FUNCTION. For subsequent quotations, the surname is sufficient: '[...]', SURNAME.

So a quote usually looks like this: 'Our award seeks to recognise the creative achievements of companies, organisations and agencies [...]', said Edith Stier-Thompson, news aktuell CEO, who started the PR-Bild Award. 'Excellent PR photography makes us laugh, cry and think. It remains in our memory [...]', Stier-Thompson continues.

Boilerplate and press contacts

It is helpful at the end of a press release to write a short paragraph of about 4-5 sentences summarising the most important facts about the company. A compact, standardised portrait of the company, commonly called a boilerplate, provides sober, fact-based information such as the year when the company was established, its most important business areas along with a promise of performance, the corporate headquarters with maybe other locations, and the number of people it currently employs. The more unknown the company, the more detailed the boilerplate can be.

Finally, press releases must close with a press contact. All important information should be included here, such as: the full company name, the contact person's name and position within the company, and personalised contact details such as telephone extension e-mail address.

Overall, press releases should be as short as possible and as long as necessary. Usually, the length varies depending on topic, occasion and sector. Average press releases are 3000-5000 characters or two A4 sheets.

Language and style of a press release

The language used in a press release is based on how journalistic news items are written. It is down-to-earth, objective and, most of all, easy to understand. So pay attention to the following linguistic and stylistic aspects:

Stick to the point

A press release should have no evaluations, emotions, speculations, superlatives or self-praise except in the quotes. Stay neutral when conveying the information and keep it as brief as possible.

Write comprehensibly and vividly

Because readers have little time, they need to understand right away what your press release is about. Comprehensible language takes the following into account:

Words:

- Use verbs instead of nouns and noun phrases
- Avoid loan words and technical terms
- No unexplainable acronyms
- No phrases, puns and filler words
- No repetitions

Sentences:

- Never use run-on or nested sentences
- Place the subject and predicate at the start of the sentence
- Formulate active instead of passive sentences

Multimedia material: Press releases should have images, infographics, videos and/or audios

Multimedia material enhances every press release because it attracts even more attention. Several studies have shown multimedia formats to be more likely noticed than clean text and for press releases with them to have a much higher reach. Likewise, most journalists prefer additional multimedia material for their editorial reporting besides the text.

Therefore, your press release should also include images, videos, audios and infographics. But make sure your material still meets journalistic standards. Your motifs should be professionally photographed or filmed in current visual language and not appear promotional. Avoid logos and exaggerated corporate identity features. Images should be of sufficient resolution (300dpi for print, 72dpi online). Ideally, both portrait and landscape formats should be used. You should also clarify the rights of use to the images, videos and audios appearing in your press releases and your references need to be legally impeccable.

Remember to use metadata (also known as IPTC data) for your multimedia content. This is crucial for both context and understanding while enabling quick classification. Professional metadata always includes meaningful titles, descriptions, information about the author, photographer and/or video editor, and the persons or objects depicted in the image, as well as when and where the image was shot.

Try not to send multimedia material as an email attachment because large files will either clog up the media creators' inboxes or may never arrive at all. Instead, upload them to a server and make them available as a download link. Such upload options are available at professional journalist databases and public relations software tools like [zimpel](#).

Timing press releases right

Whether a press release is noticed by journalists depends not only on its relevance and professional structure, but also on the right timing. Statistically, most press releases are distributed between Tuesday and Thursday. This can make sense, because on Mondays many editorial offices are tied up with organisational issues, and on Fridays they may already be halfway through the weekend. Regarding the time: Here, too, there is no right time, but it makes sense to send out press releases early (around 8 a.m.), because from 10 a.m. onwards many editorial teams are already in conferences and planning the topics of the day. Furthermore, special circumstances must be taken into account - such as special locations, major events or even holiday periods - which can affect the attention of the editorial offices. Therefore: it is best to simply try it out. For more information on "the right timing for the press release", see our blog post "[Successfully distributing press releases](#)".

Checklist: Writing a press release

Before you distribute your press release, leave it overnight if possible and read it again the next morning. Read it aloud so you can quickly notice if there are formulations that are too awkward or long. In addition, apply the four-eyes principle and let at least one other person proofread it. This checklist summarises the most important aspects of a professional press release:

- Does it meet at least one of the news values earlier mentioned and is it really relevant for the target group?
- Has the central topic and core message been formulated?

- Is it formulated in a way the target group can understand?
- Is the headline short, concise and to the point? Does the headline make it immediately clear what the central topic of the press release is?
- Does the headline also contain the central keywords for search engines to locate?
- Does the first paragraph of the press release answer the Wh-questions?
- Has the press release been structured comprehensibly? Are there subheadings?
- Is the language in the press release factual, specific, lively and easy to understand?
- Do the quotations offer added value to the content?
- Does the press release have a boilerplate and a press contact?
- Does it include supplementary material such as images, videos, audios or infographics? Are there files with meaningful meta data and have all rights been clarified?
- Have all dates, facts, figures and names been checked and found correct?
- Has the press release been checked for correct spelling and grammar?
- Are the recipients addressed correctly?

Distributing a news release

If you are seeking optimal distribution of your press releases, it is critical to address only the target groups you find relevant. The foundation for your public relations work ought to be an up-to-date, customised and well-maintained press distribution list. It should be structured for you to flexibly expand or narrow it down if needed and at least contain information on the media title, location, publication frequency, contact person and how to call or email them. Criteria such as range of subjects and ABC prioritisation can also be helpful. Each time after you have distributed a press release, update the data so you will be directly informed about any new contacts, changes in their data and media settings.

At all costs avoid distributing your press releases too broadly when doing so is not appropriate to your target group. Sending journalists content they find irrelevant too often leads them to ignore your messages, even if the press release is relevant to them.

Because researching, setting up and maintaining distribution lists can be very time-consuming, you may want to opt for using external service providers such as news aktuell. [zimpel](#) is a database and public relations software containing over 612,000 records of contacts and includes the media and topics they cover. A research team continuously updates, verifies and releases the data for communication. Various functions such as distribution list creation or mailing tool enable customised, quick and easy distribution.

If your press release is relevant to the broader public, you might want to consider using external service providers. The advantage of such an approach is the opportunity for very high reach and visibility because these distribution networks, composed of professional providers, actively supply a wide variety of payout channels. In addition, news aktuell offers [ots](#), a distribution network that plays your press release via dpa ticker directly into the right editorial departments, and it can also publish the release on [Presseportal](#), a public relations portal with one of Germany's widest reaches. This lets you reach all relevant multipliers, from editorial offices and specialist blogs to digital influencers and private stakeholders.

Finally, press releases are also distributed through the company's own channels: Besides the website (ideally a separate press or news section), these are your social media channels and also internal channels such as the corporate intranet, staff newspaper and newsletter.

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Im news aktuell-Blog dreht sich alles um die Themen, die uns in der Kommunikationsbranche bewegen: Kommunikation, Pressearbeit sowie aktuelle Trends und Insights zu PR, Journalismus und Medien. In Best Practices und How-Tos teilen unsere Expertinnen und Experten ihr Wissen rund um den Arbeitsalltag von PR-Profis und geben ganz praktische Tipps, wie man alle relevanten Zielgruppen erreicht und maximale Reichweite und Sichtbarkeit erzielt.

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