Writing Press Releases

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If writing press releases is a part of your job, then among the first things you must remember is your primary target audience is the media, not the readers of the news.

The media, as you probably know, need not and usually do not publish a large part of what you write in the press release. Catching the media's attention or interest to your piece of news therefore should be your primary objective, and that will require the news to be noteworthy.

If the news is about a new product or service, then you as the writer must highlight what is different that makes it stand out from the rest. If there is nothing worth highlighting, such as a unique selling point, then there is unlikely any news going to get published. Journalists always seek out only what is newsworthy.

One of the greatest mistakes vendors of products or services make is to have press releases contain too much technical details or the over emphasis of numerous features or functionalities. If there is nothing different or outstanding among the many things mentioned, then there is nothing much that will attract or draw the journalists' attention to write about it.

Vendors often think that information in the press release is what the end users want to read about, but frequently such details are not newsworthy for publish. Even if it does get published, it will often be placed at the end of the story. Information or text placed at the end of the story, depending on the space available in the newspaper or other media, may be lifted off by the editor or gatekeeper to give way to other more noteworthy news.

When writing a press release, therefore, a good approach is to use the 'reverse pyramid' methodology, where the most important is placed at the top and the less important at the bottom. The first paragraph, as the intro of the press release, should summarize the key points of the entire story to answer at least three of the 5Ws and 1H-who, when, why, what, where and how.

Within the press release, at least one quote or two from a spokesperson should be included as a standard practice. This is because journalists in general prefer to have someone say something within the story so as to eliminate the monotony. This is especially true for a feature story.

In short, it means when writing press releases, always remember the primary audience is the media and the content must be newsworthy.

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