WRITING THE NEWS RELEASE

Chapter 5
The basic news release is considered the backbone of almost every publicity plan. But there are obstacles and challenges to getting the media to actually use your releases. Some studies find that between 55 and 97 percent of all news releases sent to media outlets are never used. And there is massive competition for the attention of reporters and editors.
Three Keys to Release Success

- Follow a standardized format
- Provide information that will interest the audience
- Make sure your material is timely
They can help achieve organizational objectives

When they form the basis of stories in newspapers and broadcasts, releases help create awareness about ideas, situations, services and products

They are cost effective—any organization, no matter the size and financial resources, can issue effective news releases

Street cred—people consider info in a news story more believable and credible than an ad
When Planning a Release

- What is the subject of the message?
- Who is the message designed to reach?
- What is in it for this particular audience?
- What goal is the organization pursuing?
- What do you want to achieve with the news release?
- What key messages should this news release highlight?
Use 8.5 by 11 inch paper that’s 20-to-24 pound weight

Color of paper not important…news editors are looking for news value not pretty colors

Double-spacing is the standard for printed news releases sent via fax or regular mail– easier to read double-spaced

Single spacing is standard for Internet and e-mailed releases

Use Associated Press writing style and rules– conforming to AP makes the work of reporters and editors much easier
Basic Release Components

- Letterhead - organization name; news release; “For Immediate Release”; embargoed
- Contacts - usually release’s writer; PR director
- Headline - bold print, larger than text; purpose to give journalist a quick content indication; subheads more commonplace; present tense
- Dateline (not always) - city of release’s origin
- Lead Paragraph - one to three sentences; basic details; try to entice to keep reading; most newsworthy or interesting points first
- Body of text - usually follow “inverted pyramid”
- Organization Summary (“boiler-plate”) - PR jargon for basic information about an organization
Do’s and Don’t Tips

- 10 Classic News Release Mistakes (p. 129)
- Rules for Writing a News Release (p. 135)
News release format has changed somewhat to better fit e-mail and other electronic distribution

E-mail/online releases are shorter—traditional standard is fewer than 400 words; 200 e-mail with only four or five grafs and single-spaced

Use e-mail subject line to indicate release’s significance—give recipient incentive to open

Use of bullet points common in e-mail releases

Never send release as an attachment—virus concerns
Multimedia News Releases

- Evolution of news releases: Smart Media Release or SMR
- Today releases can embed high-res photos/graphics, video, and audio components
- Tags to social media networks can be included to increase search engine rankings and to drive targeted traffic to organization’s website
- SMRs pioneered by major electronic distribution services such as PR Newswire and Business Wire