



## How to make the news

By Rich Kizer & Georganne Bender

An effective press release can get your business noticed

**P**T. Barnum, he of circus fame, once said, “Without promotion something terrible happens ... nothing!” A master promoter, Barnum would sweep into town with a flourish. He’d parade the elephants through the streets and send clowns to visit children in local hospitals. He’d offer tours of the Big Top and hold contest after contest to attract crowds. The people loved it, and so did the media, which showed up in droves. Barnum was a master at publicity. You can be, too.

But what’s the difference between advertising and publicity? Easy! Advertising is best described as visibility; and public relations as credibility. You pay for advertising; PR is free. You can present your business any way you’d like in an ad because you have complete creative control over how the ad will read, and how the ad will look. You can even choose where and when the ad will run.

Publicity is a different animal altogether. In a PR campaign, you send out your press release and hope for the

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best. You have no control over what the media will say, how it will say it, or even if it will run the release at all. But when it does, you have instant credibility! After all, those wonderful things reported about you are being said by a credible source. Publicity is a great way to enhance your reputation and position yourself as an expert.

## GET OUT THE MESSAGE

This past holiday season, we decided to take Barnum at his word and create a little flourish of our own, so we contacted Ruth Furman, publicist and press agent extraordinaire. We thought the media would be interested in learning what stores do to attract shoppers during the holidays. Ruth agreed this was a great idea, so she sat down to create a press release that would get us noticed. And boy, did she get us noticed!

**“Publicity is a great way to enhance your reputation and position yourself as an expert.”**

In a matter of days, we were hot property. A number of nationwide newspapers, including the *Christian Science Monitor*, *The New York Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and the *Las Vegas Business Press* called for interviews. We were picked up by the Associated Press and other wire services. Television stations called. And a senior reporter from *Crain's Chicago Business* spent the day shopping with us, resulting in a two-page spread with color photos!

Ruth says, “When your company makes news, publicity will follow.

Catalog all the things you do in your business that build your brand; the trade shows you attend; the things you do for customers; even unique or unusual projects, products or applications. Use every opportunity to use the medias to toot your own horn!”

So, how do you do that? P.T. Barnum also said, “There’s a sucker born every day!” but when he said that, he probably wasn’t referring to editors – editors can smell an attempt at free advertising a mile away! To get your press release noticed, you must think and write like a reporter. It’s easy when you know the rules.

Every successful press release follows a specific format; a format set by the media. If you do not follow this format, your press release is likely to go unread. The good thing is once you create your own “cookie cutter” format, all you have to do is fill in the blanks each time you send one out.

## SUCCESSFUL PR

Follow these important steps to maximize your chances of getting your PR efforts recognized.

- Use letterhead with your contact information at the top. Make sure you include all information: name, address, telephone number, cell phone number, fax number, e-mail address, and web address.

- Type the words “PRESS RELEASE” or “FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE” in capital letters, across the top of the document. The words “PRESS RELEASE” can be a future event, but “FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE” means act fast – the event is happening now.

- Write a killer headline! And do it in 10 words or less. Your headline needs to summarize the entire press release. Make sure its intriguing enough to catch the eye of an editor skimming

through a handful of press releases.

The headline that captured so much attention for us read: “HOW STORES HOOK YOU: Retail Anthropologists Preview Holiday Shopping Season.”

- The first paragraph contains virtually the entire story, so pack as much information into the first sentence and first paragraph as you can. You can add details later in the release. This paragraph is the hook that gets the editorial staff interested in your story. Make sure you put these six important words to work: who, what, where, when, why, and how.

Here’s what ours said: “Have you ever wandered into a store, intending to make a specific purchase, only to find yourself leaving with a cartload of product? We all have! From the time you walk in the front door, until you are safely back in your car, savvy retailers are doing things to entice you stay longer, and spend more while you are there!”

- Write the body of your press release using an “inverted pyramid.” This strategy dictates the most important information must come first, and helps the editor adjust the story to fit the space available without losing essential information.

- Write your press release enthusiastically, but be careful to avoid unnecessary hype. It’s okay to add all the important information, but read it out loud to make sure it doesn’t sound like an ad.

Use lots of quotations. If you don’t have anyone to quote, quote yourself! You have a lot to say, and you’ll establish even more credibility.

Use a basic type font such as Times New Roman or Ariel.

Double-space your press release. Editors need space to make notes; double-spacing allows them to easily make their notes in-between the lines.

If you send your press release as an

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e-mail attachment, send it as a Word document (or similar) so the editor can easily cut and paste information from your press release into the article.

Your closing paragraph should repeat all important details, including your name and contact information. If your

story has a shelf life, add "Please run before," and "Don't run after" dates. This will help ensure your story will run on time.

End every press release with three pound signs – ### – centered at the bottom of the page. This indicates the end

of the document.

Always, always, always include a photograph! If the editors are hungry for news, they'll be thrilled you thought to include photographs.

- Compile a list of local media contacts. According to Ruth, when you are able to send your press release to a specific person, it's more likely to get noticed.

There are several ways to get your press release to the media. You can send it yourself via U.S. mail, fax, or e-mail, you can hire a top notch publicist like Ruth, or you can subscribe to a press release distribution service.

We've decided this PR business is just too hard to pass up. We've committed to do a press release each month, more often if we can swing it. We think you should, too.

On a slow news day, anything can become a hot topic, so keep your eyes open for PR opportunities. Carry a small digital camera with you at all times so you can capture important moments. Photograph in-store events, classes, and crops. Take a photo of yourself at the trade shows you attend. Corner Bill Gardner, editorial director of *Crafttrends*, and take a photo with him. If a vendor has a celebrity in their booth, wait your turn on line for a photo and a quote. And when you get home send out a press release.

Think of the impact you'll make in your community! You may not be able to afford running ads consistently in major market newspapers, but you can afford the small amount of time it takes to write a press release, and hit the send key. You'll become so famous in your own town people will line up to have their photo taken with you!

You may read our press release at <http://ruthfurman.presskit247.com>. To contact Ruth Furman, e-mail [ruth@ruthfurman.com](mailto:ruth@ruthfurman.com) or call 702/255-8288. ♦



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