

What makes a good press release? Heed this advice

GOOD: Sending press release information in the body of an e-mail. Text attachments (Word, pdfs, etc.) are fine but should be redundant.

BAD: E-mailing releases as attachments only with just the word “Press release” or “important announcement” in the subject line. We get a lot of spam that looks just like that.

GOOD: Sending announcements to us 3-5 weeks before an event.

BAD: Sending announcements 3-5 months before an event and expecting us to remember with no follow up.

GOOD: Press releases that have the key who/what/when/where/how much details clearly spelled out in the top half of the first page.

BAD: Two page+ press releases that have anything other than supplemental/background info after page 1

GOOD: High resolution (200 dpi) .jpg photos that include caption information with the first and last names of the subjects and placement in the photo (in order from left, third from the right).

BAD: Photos with generic file names that are easy to get mixed up: img0000212.jpg, img0000231.jpg, etc.

GOOD: Anticipating who we will need to talk to and including all contact information with the release.

BAD: Ignoring the “human factor.” Be sure you can answer why this announcement is important to our readers and not just your organization.

GOOD: Sending accurate information.

BAD: When correcting information, only sending the new info out of context. We used to have a big problem with a local group that would send us a five-page list of upcoming events. That in itself was OK; they had a lot of events. But when one minor part of one listing was incorrect – say, a class started at 7:30 p.m. instead of 7 p.m., we’d only get an e-mail that said: “CORRECTION: The Friday learning class starts at 7 p.m. instead of 7:30 p.m.” We’d then have to sort through the whole e-mail to find the part that was wrong and cut and paste the new info into it. Just resend the whole release with the correct info. Bolding or noting the change is fine. Just please send the whole thing again so we can just trash the first release.

GOOD: People who take the time to find out the two or three key people in the newsroom who should get their information and only send releases to them. This makes sure there is a backup if one of these people is out but doesn’t include so many names that people assume someone else is on it.

BAD: Blanketing the newsroom with e-mails. When everyone assumes everyone else got the e-mail, it’s possible that the person who needs it never does.

GOOD: Writing press releases for the press. Get to the “news” first.

BAD: Writing press releases for your bosses. We get a lot of press releases that start out by saying that at the last meeting of the ABC123 Committee, the Head Honchos of America and the Bigwig Brigade were there and said some Very Important Things. Then, in the second or third paragraph of the press release, we learn that the ABC123 Committee is creating 150 new jobs and donating \$20,000 to local kids. The meeting wasn’t the point for the press release. The jobs and donation were. Make it impossible for us to miss the real news. We have seen some folks get around the need to please all the corporate sponsors and insiders by putting “Highlights” at the top of the press release that bullet point ALL the relevant news, and then under it, actually “starting” the written press release. NOTE: Those highlights need to include all the relevant info. Just putting a headline and some subheds doesn’t count.

GOOD: Sending us source/client lists. If you represent several clients with different expertise, let us know. You never know when we may need a source for a story fast. Make it easy for us to find them.

BAD: Being a pest. Don’t flood our inboxes with lots of incremental announcements or recommendations.

Got questions about the best way to contact the StarNews? Go to StarNewsOnline.com/Contact and click on “Staff Directory.” Or call Community Engagement Editor Jeff Hidek at 343-2371.