

## **An Editor's Advice for Press Release Success**

It's no secret that editors and public relations professionals often have a love/hate relationship. We need each other in order to be effective at our jobs, but PR folks don't always understand what drives editors crazy, and editors seldom have time to explain their preferences to individual PR reps.

I don't claim to represent all editors across all media platforms and brands, but the advice I offer here is more likely than not to help PR pros become the sort of partners that editors love to work with.

### **It's called "earned media" for a reason**

To get your message picked up and used in any way by any media organization—for print, digital, social, or video repackaging—you first have to earn the attention of an editor. You do so by making the editor's job as easy as possible.

That starts by sending your message only to media organizations or editors who are likely to be interested in your news. (Note that I'm addressing email releases here, as they remain the primary way of communicating information to the media. Yes, I sometimes pick up tips from social media, but given the time I can devote to those feeds, the odds that I'll see an important item are much higher if you use email.)

### **Write a clear, meaningful subject line**

I see two types of subject lines that are almost guaranteed to make me hit Delete: the generic and the cutesy.

Generic subject lines include variants of:

- The latest news from Company X
- Company Name PR
- News release (Seriously, you don't need this even as a "lead-in" to the real subject.)

Cutesy subject lines (more likely to come from marketing departments than PR pros) run from the fanciful to the deliberately obscure:

- Got a minute? (*No, as a matter of fact. Delete.*)
- I thought you'd be interested in this
- Exciting news from Company Name

Another important advantage of keyword-rich subject lines: If I file your message in a folder for potential future follow-up, the subject line will quickly remind me why I saved it.

### **Include the message in the email message field**

If you send a press release as a pdf but include no body copy message—or add a meaningless message like, "Please see the attached release from X company" or "I hope

you'll be able to share the attached news"—the odds are almost 100% that I'll simply delete.

Whether you are dealing with print or digital media organizations, an editor will need to cut and paste at least a portion of your press release if it is used. If you send your release as a pdf, that operation requires more, messy steps and acts as a disincentive to using the material. Faced with two releases on the same issue (or two "comments from experts" on breaking news), I'm more likely to choose the one that's easier to use.

If your company insists on sending a "pretty" formatted pdf, go ahead and include it if you must. Some media companies may publish pdfs online as they come in. However, also include the full text or core message in the body of your email.

### **Another reason I won't open your attachment: Cybersecurity**

Even if I am familiar with the company you represent, I may not be familiar with you. Even if I know you, how do I know your email account hasn't been hacked (this recently happened at another media company)? Exercising caution with attachments is just good digital hygiene.

### **Craft a message that's easy to scan**

I recently received an ideal press release:

- The subject line included the company name and "what happened" details.
- The body of the message was customized with my name (not the name of someone who has never worked for our brand or who hasn't worked for the brand in over a decade).
- The first, short paragraph provided a succinct summary of the industry development and why it mattered. The second two-sentence paragraph offered to set me up with someone if I wanted to follow up.
- The full release followed after the PR rep's signature, which included her full contact information.

This sort of message saves me time and lets me dive as deeply as I want or have time for. It provides all the essentials in a format that I can cut and paste or follow up on.

### **Don't embed photos and other images**

Don't include images in the body of the email, which can require recipients to click the "Download pictures" button in their email program. If we don't click that button, formatting of the rest of the message can be funky or, if you've sent the entire message as an image, invisible. (E-newsletters are a different story.)

Instead, send at least the core message as plain text and mention that high-res images are attached or available at a corporate website. (And, for faster cybersecurity checks, make the actual URL visible rather than hiding it behind a shortened link or text.)

### **Always start with email**

If you call to deliver your news, you are very likely interrupting me, which means you don't have my full attention. If you send me an email, I can assess whether or not it's useful, and if it is, I can read it when I can pay attention to your message. Email also means I don't have to take notes from a phone call, which is less work for you but more work for me.

### **Use follow-ups that assist rather than annoy**

Follow-ups by phone are practically an admission that you know you did a poor job with the email.

Different editors will have different preferences, but most will not want a phone call from someone they've never heard of, let alone never worked with. So don't call and say, "I just wanted to make sure you got the email I sent last week..." What matters is whether or not the message was pertinent. If you've spent 10 minutes on our site or with our magazine or have reviewed our contributors' guidelines, you'll know whether or not your press release or pitch was pertinent. If I got it and was interested, I will have used it, forwarded it, or filed it. If not, I deleted it.

If you're sure your message was important to our brand, and you really want to follow up, do so by email a day or a week later—depending on the topic's time-sensitivity. Make the subject line specific, rather than "Did you get my message yesterday?" And be sure to include the original message so that I don't have to go searching for it in case I do happen to be interested. I may still not respond—for any number of reasons, but most likely because the news either isn't immediately useful or I'm just too busy to get back to you.

If you are following up because you want to know if we *used* information from your release, don't. Just check our site or a search engine or our Twitter feed to see if your story got picked up. If the material is used in print, you'll have to be patient, but the content will also appear online—either before or after it appears in print.

The amount of content, the speed at which we have to develop and process it, and the increasingly inverse ratio of staff to tasks all mean that nobody has time to send you a message saying that we used a quote from your press release in a news story that we ran. As for sending a tearsheet that mentions your news item in print or, even more improbable, sending you the entire issue (I've actually had a PR firm from another country request that), don't expect it. Have you checked the cost of print production and mailing these days? Remember, you're getting free media; the very likely revenue-challenged media company that you are asking a favor of is not going to spend its money to send you anything you didn't pay for.

### **Don't take silence personally**

I get as many as 300 emails a day, and there are editors working for much more widely known media brands that get many more. That's why, even if I'm interested in your message, I likely will not respond unless I have an immediate need to follow up or get more information.

Even if you are the consummate media communications pro and we've worked together in the past, you may not hear back from me any time soon. Sometimes that means I've filed your message and may follow up in six months when we work on a trend feature that's related to your message. Sometimes it means that what you sent is interesting, but it just didn't make the cut for our available print space or digital production time.

### **Be the media rep editors love**

Editors and PR firms and corporate media reps need each other. Without PR folks sharing timely, useful developments, editors would have a much harder time staying current with their industry or beat.

The elements that make for strong media relationships can vary based on everything from the industry to the individuals on both sides of the information-sharing relationship, but one thing that will always make you a favorite of editors is to follow through on promises. All of us—editors and PR pros—are always busy, so we have to accept that instant response may not be possible. However, if you've offered more information or an exclusive interview by phone or email with a key contact, try to respond in a time frame that's appropriate for the media platform and the story's time-sensitivity.

I've posted this tip sheet on our website ([powermag.com/about-us](http://powermag.com/about-us)) to make it available to those who interact with our brand (and who should send press releases to [editor@powermag.com](mailto:editor@powermag.com) in order to reach all of our editors). If other editors have additional tips for enhancing the success of press releases (especially for B2B brands), please share them in the comments.

—**Gail Reitenbach** is editor of *POWER*, which has served the global power generation industry since 1882. In former careers, she was a marketing communications consultant, book editor, and English professor.