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Creating a Promo Kit that Works

Lesson 2: News Releases

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Lesson 2

News Releases



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Sample News Release

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If you're sending your press kit to media, a news release (alias "press release") placed in the front of the press kit, is their cue that there's a newsworthy story to write about. News releases are the standard currency for reporters. They follow a very specific format, and writers expect that format, so be sure to write them correctly.

Start with a snappy headline. The headline is the most important part of the news release. It needs to sum up the news in one compelling sentence. Your reader will decide whether to read the whole thing if and only if the headline is good. For example, "Buck Dewey Big Band Releases Second CD *War Bonnet Love Sonnet*." Yawn. Bands release CDs every day. So give them a specific event to publicize: "Buck Dewey Big Band to host CD Release Party at Middle East Café, Cambridge, Mass." That gives the journalist an idea that there is an event to cover.

News releases can be a great way to get free publicity, so it's worth every second you spend learning how to write them.

If you've got a writer friend who can help you, by all means ask! A public relations professional will typically charge about \$150 to write a news release for you. Fortunately, you've taken this class, so you've got a publicity writer at your service. Let's do a mock news release.

Remember what news releases are for: **NEWS**. Be sure that what you have to say is newsworthy and stick to the **5 w's**: who, what, where, when, and why.

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Clarity. Your target for a news release is a journalist--a writer. Their goal is to write about you, and fast. If your press release is written well, they may very well reprint it word for word. It happens all the time. The better your news release is, the better its chances of getting printed. Keep it newsworthy and direct; this is not the place to wax poetic. Be objective and keep your writers happy.

The "so what?" factor. Understand that media's primary goal is to appeal to their readers. The journalist or editor who reads your news release will decide after reading the headline or if you're lucky, the very first paragraph whether or not they are interested in your story. So be sure to say in the very first paragraph why the news you are sending matters, why it is important, and how it affects their readership.

Stories that matter should tie in to an event. Perhaps you are playing for a benefit, or want to publicize a particular show. Live events remain very important for print journalists. "I tend to like to see an act in person," says music writer Steve Morse. "I don't usually get behind an act unless they're good in concert. The lifeblood of the business still resides in the live show. You don't want to get burned for promoting a band that sounds good on CD but is not good live. I take reviews very seriously, because a quote from the Globe says that the band is more than just a small local group. When they get to touring, they'll use my quote in other cities, and if my quote in these is saying it's good when it's not, our credibility goes out the window."

Some stories will stand a better chance of getting written up in a nonmusic magazine. Look at your other assets: the uniqueness of your Web site, the uniqueness of your marketing scheme, the story of a hometown guy following his heart and "making it," a careers section story: balancing full-time work and music. Or, hold a benefit concert and "piggyback" on the organization you are performing to benefit.

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News releases should be organized from most important and most relevant to least important. The news should be front and center, and the explanation and background should follow. Hit the highlights of your story in the lead paragraph, including the exact day, date, time, location name, address, city, and phone number of the event location. Check out some news stories. Newspapers are written so that people can get the gist of the story just by reading the first paragraph. Further detail is given the further down you get in the article. Your news release should be modeled the very same way. "As an editor, I like the press release to read like a news story," says Rick Mattingly. "If the first paragraph doesn't grab me, I won't read the second, third, or fourth paragraph."

Make it newsworthy. Media consider a story to be newsworthy if it applies to the demographics and geographics of their audience. A CD release may not be enough news to warrant a press kit. The CD can just be mailed with background information that describes it--but not your whole life story. However, a CD release party may warrant a story. Just make it relevant. City journalists won't be particularly interested in printing a story about your CD release party in a city that is 40 miles away. Check out the publications you're interested in, and find out what they write about and what area they cover.

Style. You can find out more about the standard grammar, punctuation, spelling, and writing style for news releases in the *Associated Press Stylebook* (Perseus Books).

There's a nice short version online, called the "[Band-Aid AP Stylebook](#)".

Length and format. Keep to one page, typed and double spaced. Use standard 8 ½ x 11 paper, with your letterhead. Use 1-inch margins, and use a typeface that is familiar, such as Palatino or Times New Roman. Fancy typeface will only garner enough attention to get your news release to the trashcan faster. The less clutter you give the recipient the better.

“ I have written lots of press releases for such labels as Blue Note, Mosaic, Evidence, and ECM,” says writer/editor Rick Mattingly. “Generally, those companies wanted press releases that were one page long, including a short bio of the artists. Some companies would have a one-page release on a record, and a separate page with a bio of the leader, and shorter bios of the sidemen. The whole kit might be two sheets of paper, a photo of the leader or band, and a copy of the album. ”

Lead time. Be sure to send your news release out with enough advance time before the event. For example, newspaper music reviewers tend to set up their schedules early in the week, so if you want to get them to attend an event, send it a full week ahead of time.

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Many news releases say "For Immediate Release" at the top. That means that the information must be released immediately or it is out of date. There's nothing more annoying to a journalist than to have to open an envelope marked "For Immediate Release" or "urgent" only to find that the news is not urgent. Journalists do not consider your CD release to be urgent. Unless you are already a superstar, there's probably no information that you release that could possibly be urgent (except to you.) So skip that. A simple "News Release" at the top will do.

For more information, go to Google.com, and search under "how to write a press release." You will find oodles of Web pages that offer endless style tips. One great site that has helpful links is: <http://www.cucliscommunications.com/newsrels.html>.

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