



Bill Stoller's

Free Publicity

The Newsletter For PR-Hungry Businesses

Bill Stoller, Editor & Chief Publicity Insider

ISSN# 1542-5770

New Ezine Subscriber Bonus Report

Press Release Secrets

The Inside Scoop on Crafting a Killer Press Release



Presented By Bill Stoller's Free Publicity

The Newsletter for PR Hungry Businesses

For More Info, Go To:

<http://www.publicityinsider.com/freepub.asp>

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The 10 Press Release Commandments

The Inside Scoop on Crafting a Killer Press Release

Every press release is different, but, regardless of its content, I try to make each release I write conform to these 10 Press Release Commandments:

1. Thou shalt be professional. No goofy fonts, rainbow paper or silly gimmicks. Even lighthearted press releases represent a communication between one professional and another.

2. Thou shalt not be promotional. This is something Bill talks about quite a bit in the pages of this newsletter. If you can't get enough objective distance from your company to write a press release that's not filled with hype and puffery, hire someone to write it for you.

3. Thou shalt not be boring. Even the driest subject matter allows for some sparks of creativity. Journalists like knowing that there's a human being communicating with them, not some corporate robot.

4. Thou shalt be brief. Learn to cut out extraneous words. Keep your sentences short. Include only the points necessary to sell the story. The well-crafted one page press release is a thing of beauty.

5. Thou shalt know thy recipient. A feature or specialty editor is a very different creature from a city desk editor. If you're promoting the opening of a new winery, the food and wine editor may be interested in all the details about what kind of aging process and wine press you're using. The city desk editor just wants to know when the grand opening is and what's going to happen there.

6. Thou shalt use the proper tense. When writing a hard news release -- a contract signing, a stock split, a major announcement, etc.) use the past tense (*Acme Industries has changed its name to AcmeCo, the company announced today...*) When writing a soft news release -- a trend story, a personal profile, etc. -- use the present tense (*Jane Smith is one of the best marathon runners over 40. She's also blind. Thanks to new technology from AcmeCo, Jane is able to...*).

7. Thou shalt think visually. A press release is more than words -- it's a visual document that will first be assessed by how it looks.

I'm referring to more than font size or letterhead. I'm talking about the actual layout of the words. Whether received by mail, fax or e-mail, a journalist -- often unconsciously -- will make decisions about whether to read the release based on how the release is laid out. Big blocks of text and long

paragraphs are daunting and uninviting. Short paragraphs and sentences make for a much more visually inviting look.

When writing a non-hard news release, I often use a simple formula -- the lead should be one or two sentences at most. The next paragraph should be very, very short.

Like this.



Continued on next page 

10 Press Release Commandments ... *continued from previous page*

8. Thou Shalt Tell a Story. How to arrange the facts of a hard news release is pretty much cut and dried. The old “who, what, when, where and how” lead and “inverted pyramid” concepts still hold. (Rather than engage you in a course in basic newswriting, I’ll direct you to a really good discussion of what the inverted pyramid is. Check out <http://www.poynter.org/column.asp?id=52&aid=38693>.)

So let’s focus on a soft news release. The trend story, the feel-good company story, the “gee-whiz, I didn’t know anyone was doing that!” release. The difference between these releases and the hard news release is simply a mirror of the difference between a feature story in, say, the entertainment section of your newspaper and the breaking news report on page one. The hard news story is about cold, hard facts (*A mudslide closed portions of Interstate 70 last night, causing massive delays*). A feature article about the guy who spends all day looking at seismograph readouts trying to predict where the next mudslide will occur will be very different. It’s likely to be in present tense, it won’t load all the facts upfront and it will be designed to draw the reader deep into the text. It is, in short, all about storytelling.

Here’s the formula I use for these kinds of releases. I call it the *3S approach -- Situation/Surprise/Support*.

The first paragraph sets up the situation. The second paragraph reveals the surprise. The third paragraph supports the claim made in the second paragraph.

One very typical 3S is discussing a common problem in the first paragraph (*For centuries, people have accepted memory loss as an inevitable result of aging*.) The “surprise” paragraph announces the solution to the problem (*But one local man says he’s ready to prove the medical establishment wrong*.) The “support” paragraph then tells the story. (*John Smith, an Anytown entrepreneur, says he’s found the key to retaining a strong memory function far into old age. His “Memory Maker” software is based on ancient Chinese texts that were used more than 2000 years ago to...*)

Another 3S -- let’s revisit our mudslide watching friend. How would you start his story using this method?

While John Smith’s colleagues at the National Atmospheric Center are watching the skies for signs of lightning and tornadoes, his attention is focused elsewhere.

John Smith is listening to the mud.

As the Chief Mudslide Analyst at the NAC, Smith spends his days glued to a seismograph, eyes and ears peeled for the telltale signs on an impending slide.



Along with the 3S in action, I also followed the 7th Commandment. That really short second paragraph is a visual grabber, and will keep the journalist reading right into the meat of the release.

9. Thou Shalt Not Bear False Witness. This may seem an obvious point, but it always bears repeating.

Tell the truth.

Don’t inflate, don’t confabulate, don’t exaggerate. Don’t twist facts, don’t make up numbers, don’t make unsubstantiated claims. Any decent journalist will be able to see right through this. If you’re lucky, your release will just get tossed out. If you’re unlucky, you’ll be exposed.

It’s a chance not at all worth taking. Make sure every release you write is honest and on the level.

10. Thou Shalt Know Thy Limitations. Not everyone can write a press release. A good feature release, in particular, isn’t an easy thing to craft. If you just don’t feel like you have the chops to get the job done, hire a professional.

One last tip: right before you start writing your release, spend an hour or two reading your daily paper, paying special attention to stories similar in feel to yours. Immerse yourself in how the pros do it and you’ll be in the right frame of mind to tackle the job!



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When Writing Press Releases, It's all About Style

Maximize Your Chances of Success By Writing Like a Journalist

In baseball, it's said that you know an umpire is top-notch when you never notice his presence. If he's doing his job, he won't call attention to himself in any way. It's much the same for the writer of a press release. When the recipient of a release focuses only on its content -- and not on its creation -- the writer has succeeded. With that in mind, here's how to develop a style that can help give you a big edge in placing your press releases.

Master News Style By Reading News Stories. The folks who write wire copy for the Associated Press are masters at presenting information without calling attention to themselves. Read all the AP wire copy you can (<http://customwire.ap.org/dynamic/fronts/HOME>) and get a sense of the rhythm and flow of their writing. Examine their choice of words and sentence structure (typically, they choose the simplest way of saying things) and their overall tone of solid objectivity. This is the style to which you should aspire.

Write a great lead. The lead paragraph in a press release should, theoretically, be able to stand alone as a news item. A standard news lead answers the Five W's -- Who? What? Where? When? Why? Successfully answer those five questions in one paragraph and you've summarized everything beautifully.

Bad lead: *The new Acme X100 is drawing raves from customers, who call it the best thing to happen to the flanging industry since the X99.*

Good lead:

Philadelphia -- Calling it a "milestone day for our industry", the Acme Company unveiled the first flanger

capable of creating widgets using only solar power. According to Acme President Joe Blow, the X100 is expected to find wide use in the developing world, where access to traditional electric power is unreliable.

The Five W's are answered! **Who:** the Acme Company. **What:** the introduction of the solar-powered X100. **Where:** in Philadelphia (the headquarters for our fictional company). **When:** August 15. And, most important, **Why:** for use in the developing world.

Bottomline: What We Teach In Free Publicity Works.

Why let your competition grow their businesses through publicity, while you sit on the sidelines?

Don't take our word for it:

"Dear Bill:

You are a miracle worker! I used a technique mentioned in last month's Free Publicity for a pitch to NY editors and I scored 7 interviews for my CEO including: Food & Wine Magazine, Gourmet, Epicurious, Country Living, House and Garden, House Beautiful, & In Style. The editor of Town and Country told me it was the best pitch he'd seen in three years.

Linda West Eckhardt
James Beard Award winning cookbook author
Owner, Spotlight Food Public Relations

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<http://www.publicityinsider.com/freepub.asp>

Press Release Style... *continued from the previous page*

Remember this: in almost every release that's successful, what put it over the top was the answer to "Why?". You must make plain the significance of your news by answering that question succinctly and without hype!

Write in Third Person. Perhaps it's a silly convention, but press releases really should be written as if they're coming from an objective outsider to your company, not from within your business. Of course, the journalist knows better, but nonetheless, they expect releases to be written in the third person. In short, here's the difference between first person and third person:

- **First person:** *We've developed the Acme X100. It's our most advanced model ever.*
- **Third person:** *Acme Industries has developed the X100, which a company spokesperson called its "most advanced ever"*

Attribute all opinions. Never flatly state an opinion. If you want to state an opinion or, as in the above example, make a claim, always attribute it to a representative of the company (which very well may end up to be you!). Anything apart from entirely factual info (dates, store availability, product features, biographical information, etc.) should be attributed. Again, the best way to get a feel for this is to read wire copy. Start sorting out the things a reporter feels comfortable including without attribution and things for which he uses a named source.

Use the Inverted Pyramid. On the first day of Journalism 101, aspiring scribes learn about the Inverted Pyramid. Basically, it's way of organizing information so that the most important information is at the top -- the widest part of the Inverted Pyramid -- and, as you funnel down to the narrowest point, the information becomes less and less vital. There's a good reason for this: if a reporter's 10 paragraph story gets cut to 6 paragraphs because of space considerations, the reader will still be informed of the most important news. What's cut will be background, quotes and other nonessential material. When writing a press release, the Inverted Pyramid is equally important. First, it's the style the journalist is comfortable with and second, it assures that even if a rushed reporter can only read the first couple of paragraphs, she'll get enough info

to decide whether to use the release or not. If you bury the best part of your release in the fourth paragraph, the recipient may never make it that far.

Remove all "stoppers". A "stopper" is something that will stop a journalist in her tracks and distract her attention. Once that happens, your release is toast. The point of your press release: to present information in the least obtrusive way possible. Consider it this way: the journalist isn't dumb -- she knows full well that you've sent her the press release for purely commercial reasons, hoping to get publicity that will make you more money. She can live with that as long as [a] there's something in it for her (a good story) and [b] she's not reminded of your commercial desires too often. A "stopper" breaks the suspension of disbelief needed for this little dance to be successful. It's the boom mike showing up in the frame of a movie -- once you've seen it, it's hard to convince yourself that you're really experiencing something that happened during, say, the Middle Ages.

Here are some 'stoppers' to avoid:

- **Clunky language.** Journalists keep their language pretty simple. Long words, compound sentences and lofty, pretentious phrases are no-no's. Keep your sentences short. Don't try to present more than one idea in a paragraph. Avoid words you wouldn't use in everyday circumstances.
- **Hype and puffery.** The ultimate "stopper". Confusing press release copy with advertising copy is a pervasive problem with businesspeople. Don't call yourself the greatest, the hottest, the coolest, the most unique or anything of the sort. If you must make a claim of superiority for your product, service or company, attribute it. *Acme President Joe Blow said the X100 "has the opportunity to revolutionize the industry" is much better than *The revolutionary Acme X100 is the greatest industrial advance since the Wright brothers flew at Kitty Hawk.**
- **Trademark Symbols.** Including™ or ® or © screams "hey, check me out! I'm a press release! I come from a business! The legal department made me include this stuff!"

The bottom line: write like a journalist, avoid the stoppers and answer the Five W's and you'll succeed!



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Crafting Press Releases That Search Engines Will Love

Once upon a time, press releases served a single purpose: they were tools to entice a journalist to produce a story highlighting your product or company. But, as in almost every other aspect of running a business, things have changed thanks to the Internet.

Today, studies indicate that the vast majority of journalists working a story or seeking ideas are likely to turn first to the search engine of their choosing. Where the primary goal was once to get your printed press release opened and read, the new "job one" for publicity seekers is making certain that, when a journalist types in keywords that relate to your business, you're right there, at the top of the rankings.

Of course, getting your main website as optimized and as search engine-friendly as can be is a hot and vital topic for all businesses, and it's one that can fill entire books (and it has -- *Winning the Search Engine Wars* by Planet Ocean and *Search Engine Marketing: The Essential Best Practice Guide* by Mike Grehan are two excellent resources). For this article, however, we'll focus on just one task: how to get your press releases indexed, and highly ranked by major search engines. Many of the principles that apply to getting entire sites highly ranked are similar, but there are some things unique to press release-only search engine optimization.

Let's start with some words of wisdom offered by a fellow *Free Publicity* subscriber. Tim Leffel, author of *The World's Cheapest Destinations* (<http://www.worldscheapdestinations.com>) was kind enough lay out the steps he's taken to assure that his press releases are well-indexed and ready to grab the attention of any searching travel journalist. So let's turn it over to Tim:

1) *Get as many links back to your web site as possible from like-minded sites (and return the favor)—this has more impact than anything.*

2) *Always feature your web site address in any articles or press releases as this will often show up as another link if the article is posted on the web.*

3) *Get as many relevant keywords that relate to your expertise/product as you can into the content of your web site pages, and not just the home page. The more specific, the better. (For example, "cheap flights" wouldn't do me much good since there are probably a thousand sites using those words.)*

Bottomline: What We Teach In Free Publicity Works.

Why let your competition grow their businesses through publicity, while you sit on the sidelines?

Don't take our word for it:

"Dear Bill:

Through years of following the solid advice and contacts in your Free Publicity Newsletter, I've gotten press on my travel books in **The Wall Street Journal, USA Today, Men's Health, Forbes, Newsweek, MSN Money**, and a variety of major market newspapers. Some of these features are still sending people to my related Web sites -- months or years after the story first appeared in print."

Tim Leffel

Author, Make Your Travel Dollars Worth a Fortune

www.contrariantraveler.com/index.html

To learn more about Bill Stoller's Free Publicity Newsletter & view a sample issue, go to:

<http://www.publicityinsider.com/freepub.asp>

Crafting Search Engine Friendly Press Releases... *continued from previous page*

4) Pay to submit your sites to all the search engines at once, ideally several times per year. I use www.ineedhits.com, which is downright cheap.

5) If it makes sense for your business, start a weblog and contribute regularly. For whatever reason, these tend to get high rankings in Google. Write about what you know and use targeted, relevant keywords in the title. For example, I've probably gotten 700 or 800 hits on my book site from this entry alone: <http://blogs.booklocker.com/travel/archives/000966.html>

6) I've read that static web sites don't fare as well in search results, so it makes sense to update the site on a regular basis, even if you're not changing much. Apparently the search spiders look at the "last published" date in your code.

Some writers are adamant that you shouldn't write without getting paid. I think that's bunk. Every time you write an article for a web site, that's another notch in your web search visibility and if you've put a link to your own site, another addition to your score.

All this takes time to work, so people shouldn't expect instant results. Over time though, it snowballs. When I pull up my name or the name of my book on the search engines, it goes on for at least ten pages. And yes, it always makes sense to have a few relevant keywords or phrases in all of your press releases, especially if you're an expert in a specific area. Envision what words should lead someone to your web site, then make sure those are in there somewhere.

Wow -- that's some sage advice from a fellow publicity seeker who's doing it the right way!

I'll add a few extra tips that seem to be working:

* Consider distributing your release through a paid service like [PR Newswire](http://www.prnewswire.com). These folks **practically invented** the idea of search engine optimized press release distribution, and they consistently get their clients releases at the top of the engines.

* Choose your keywords carefully. Again (and this is the *Free Publicity* mantra), think like a journalist! If a journalist was using Google to search for story ideas in your area of expertise, which words or phrases would he or she enter? Need some help figuring this out? Try the excellent service WordTracker (<http://www.wordtracker.com>). It's a brilliantly-designed

resource to nail down exactly the right keywords for your company. A free alternative is The Overture Search Term Suggestion Tool (<http://inventory.overture.com/d/searchinventory/suggestion/>). My advice? Use them both!

* When you write your press release, pick your main keyword or keyword phrase in the page title, the headline and the subhead. Then put it in the lead paragraph! Don't try to jam more than one keyword phrase into the release and dilute your chances of a high ranking. Keep it simple. Let's say you're in the business of selling digital photography equipment. Your visit to WordTracker informs you that the most searched phrase related to your industry is "digital camera". Your release deals with consumer tips to avoid fraud. Further research shows that the phrase "rip-off" is heavily searched. Thus, your keyword phrase is "digital camera rip-off". Here's how you might craft your release:

Page Title: Avoiding Digital Camera Rip-Offs

Headline: How To Avoid Rip-Offs When Buying a Digital Camera

Subhead: Danger -- Digital Camera Rip-Off Artists at Work!

Lead Sentence: Digital camera rip-offs are on the rise, according to digital camera expert Joe Smith.

One more thing: keep your release short so you don't dilute your the impact of your keyword phrase!

* Getting links to your release is vital. Link to it from your home page, and try to garner links from e-zines, blogs and websites with good Google Page Ranks (get the Google toolbar to help determine page rankings of other sites). What you're shooting for would be something like this:

Joe Smith has some great ideas about how not to get ripped off when buying a digital camera. You can see his tips at <http://nameofsite.com/ripoffrelease.html>

* One last bit of advice -- after you've done it once, keep at it! Build a library of search engine optimized press releases and the media will keep finding you. Imagine that: journalists coming to you without getting on the phone, begging, pleading or sending out mailing after mailing. You gotta love the Internet..



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Greetings!

I'm Bill Stoller and, for more than two decades, I've devoted my professional life to helping some of America's best-known companies get massive publicity. I've used every tactic imaginable — and created more than a few of them myself. The result: I know *exactly* what works and what doesn't when it comes to getting media coverage. Now I'd like to share my knowledge with you.

Every issue of *Free Publicity* is packed with my personal insight, opinions and plenty of step-by-step instruction about the *right* way to get publicity. I guarantee, this isn't the same old stuff and it's *definitely* not rehashed theory. Everything in *Free Publicity* is based on actual PR work that I've done — much of it revealed for the very first time.

Here's a sampling of what you'll find in *Free Publicity*:

- **Hot Opportunities:** I'll tell you when editors and reporters are actively seeking information for upcoming stories, and I'll break down new media outlets to uncover PR openings.
- **In-Depth Analysis:** Get inside top magazines, newspapers, radio and TV shows from a publicist's perspective. Free Publicity digs deep to help you score big.
- **Tools of the Trade:** Press releases, pitch letters, media alerts, fact sheets, you name it. If there's a tool that will help you succeed. I'll tell you how to make it work for you. You won't believe the battle-tested secrets I have to share about these babies!
- **Internet Publicity Tips:** Most people who talk about getting publicity online aren't publicists, so they really don't have a clue. I'm going to save you time, money and aggravation by telling you how to work the web for story placements.
- **Journalist Profiles:** It's time for me to call in some favors with an elite group of journalists. Top editors and reporters will share, in their own words, what works and what doesn't when it comes to pitching the media — and they'll each give you the inside scoop on what they're covering and how to contact them.

Plus, there's so much more: book reviews; no B.S. resource recommendations; press release makeovers; the latest industry news; guest columns from some of the nation's top marketing minds...well, you get the idea. Plus, Free Publicity subscribers get **amazing bonuses worth hundreds of dollars!**

Continued on next page 

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"Dear Bill:

Keep up the good work. Your *Free Publicity* newsletter is such a pleasure to read. Not only is the information practical and timely, it's an easy read. From the clean layout, to the logical flow of the information, it's fun and informative at the same time. In our business, a lot of publications are 'required reading' for us and our clients; it's nice to have one I look forward to opening each month."

Kind regards,

Lizz Harmon
President
HarmonTampa Public Relations, Inc.
<http://www.harmontampa.com>

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New subscribers receive a **FREE** one year membership to PR Newswire, the world's most respected press release distributor. Without a subscription to *Free Publicity*, a mandatory membership to PR Newswire would cost you **\$195.00!** The \$195.00 waived membership fee is open to new PR Newswire members only.

BONUS #2: Bill's Inner Circle Membership

Inside Bill's PR Inner Circle, you'll find public relations gold - links to media website contact pages that provide the actual names, e-mail addresses and phone numbers of the top editors at the top newspapers, regional business publications, trade magazines, & wire services. We also include a free listing of editorial calendars for selected top magazines! There are many who charge hundreds of dollars for access to this type of information, but at *Free Publicity*, we give it away for free to our valued customers!

BONUS #3: Killer eBook - "From The Greatest Minds In PR"

Here's your chance to learn PR secrets from the masters. How-to's include "Get Rich & Become Famous Being A Guest On Big Radio Shows", "10 Publicity Tips to Using E-Mail to Get News Coverage" and many more. A \$30 value.

Final Bonus: If you're one of the next 50 subscribers, you'll receive a handy reference guide, "Top 100 Daily Newspapers in the U.S. by Circulation" !

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I am so confident that *Free Publicity* will be exactly what you're searching for that I back it up with this guarantee:

Try the first issue. Read the articles, use the publicity tips and take advantage of my insider secrets. Then, if you don't agree that *Free Publicity* is the essential tool for any PR-hungry business, e-mail us or call us to and we'll gladly refund every penny. The first issue is yours to keep as my gift.

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