

PUBLIC RELATIONS

The Four Parts of a Press Release

1. The lead paragraph: This paragraph, which need not consist of more than one or two sentences, should contain all of the basic information about the event. Answers to the questions, WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, and WHY should be written here in as simple a form as possible.
2. The "mission" paragraph: This paragraph states the importance of the event. Evidence of how the event may impact your community or of how results of the event may affect your constituents should be included here. If your event is intended to be a fundraiser, for example, give an explanation of how the funds will be used.
3. Relevant quotes: A quote from someone close to the event should follow the mission paragraph (Note: in a short release, this can also be the mission paragraph, i.e. so and so states the mission in their quote). If you don't already have a quote and can call someone to get a quote from him or her, you may want to prepare a few sample quotes that would fit well into your release. Sometimes having these ready to suggest to the person when you call helps that person to understand what you are looking for and makes him or her feel less "on the spot."
4. Background information: One paragraph about the history of the event or the organization should come last.

Short

- A short release is best, about one page single-spaced.
- Use short, concise paragraphs of two to four sentences.
- A person's full name should be used just once. After the first introduction, only a last name should be used.

Clear

- Typed on official letterhead.
- Include release date and the name and telephone number of at least one contact person at the top of the release.
- An informative, interesting headline printed in bold letters should be at the top of the release.

Follow up

- Mail the release out three weeks before the event for print media and calendar listings or fax (or e-mail) it out three days before the event for TV crews.
- Within 24 hours of when you think the release should have been received, call every recipient to be sure that it was not lost
- Be available to the press during the days before the event so that they may call you with questions

These press release steps courtesy: www.lawg.org

There's another really great outline (step-by-step) of how to do it at

<http://www.thewritemarket.com/press/nash.htm>

And here are two other sites describing how to write press releases:

Schmooze, Don't Lose!

<http://www.lunareclipse.net/pressrelease.htm>
<http://www.billhartzer.com/howtopressrelease.html>

E-mail addresses for your local and regional papers (as well as radio and TV stations) can be found on their web sites. There are some web sites that have a catalogue of VT newspapers:

<http://www.vtliving.com/newspapers/>
<http://www.officialusa.com/stateguides/media/newspapers/vermont.html>

BUDGET IDEAS

What can you do with \$500 or \$1000? Plenty!

You should be able to get some consulting help from a consultant in your region, if you feel you need an outside opinion. Ideally what you want from the consultant is a plan, and the information and action steps you need to follow the plan. Consultants can be helpful in many areas besides marketing: organizational development, training, fundraising, events, etc. Don't forget that you also have a wealth of information available from the State Library Association.

Don't be afraid to ask for a donation of time. If you can be very specific and limited – i.e., you want them to donate 5 hours to help you put together a PR plan – they are much more likely to sign on for the task. Feel free to contact me for the name of a consultant in your region if you're having trouble finding one.

Graphic design is also an important factor. A new logo or image for your library can cost hundreds of dollars, but it is well worth the money, and you will use it for many years to come. If you have to choose between writing and design, always pay for design (unless you are a great designer).

Public relations activity costs you nothing but time – time to plan and write and follow up. With the advent of e-mail, there is almost no cost attached to sending a release.

CUSTOMER SERVICE

The bottom line is that a library is a service organization. Like any such organization, you'll have difficult customers. The transaction can be made easier if you realize that, with most patrons, you do not have to explain why it happened or assign blame. Instead, use this famed customer service four-step plan:

Listen to the problem, patiently

Apologize for the inconvenience or distress

Solve – state what you will do next (“I'll tell Fred right away.”)

Thank them for bringing it to your attention

Satisfied customers will come back, will speak highly of the library, and will support you when you need it. A complaint is not an problem, it's an opportunity to learn and to build loyalty.