



ONE's Tips: Press Releases

What is a press release?

Public Relations practitioners use press releases as a way to alert the media of a news story concerning a particular event, person, service or product. In essence, they aim to fuel media interest. Press releases or 'media releases' are reproduced news stories that are sent out to the relevant people within the media, i.e. news editors, reporters, journalists or the planning desk of a publication/station. This is with the intention of getting the piece covered by getting written about or mentioned on air/TV).

Lodges can use a press release to promote fundraising events, donations, community initiatives or any other activity that local freemasons may be involved in.

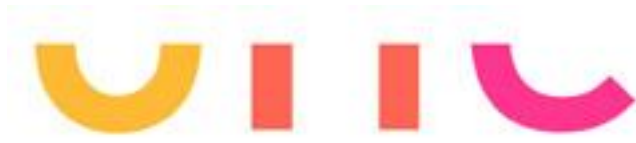
Why use a press release?

The job of a journalist is to write a news worthy story, however it is more than likely they won't have time to find one. Press releases make their job a little bit easier, they are designed to catch the eye of a journalist and draw their attention to the particular news worthy story.

It is important to remember that journalists receive many press releases on a daily basis, therefore the competition is very high, so it is essential that your press release is the one that catches their attention by being well written and interesting.

How is a press release used?

Press releases are often sent out on their own (occasionally they can be part of a press pack or be sent with a pitch letter), by either post, email or fax. If you



are sending a press release by email, cut and paste it into the body of the email, as most journalists will not bother opening attachments. Most journalists prefer to receive their press releases via email.

What to include in a press release

A press release consists of many sections.

1. Date
2. Headline
3. Subhead
4. Introduction/Leading paragraph
5. Body of the story
6. Notes to Editor

In addition to this there are things such as the, logo, title, and contact details.

1. It is very important to clearly mark the **date** at the top of the press release. This is so the journalist knows when you want it to be published. You may want the information to be released in a week, if that is the case you would write, for example *'To be embargoed until ...'* this informs the journalist that the news item is not to be published prior to the date indicated. Alternatively if the press release were for now you would write *'For immediate release'*.

2. A good **headline** is imperative. It should catch the journalist's interest instantly and entice them to read on. Try and make the headline short, it should tell the reader in as few words as possible what the rest of the document is about. It should be typed in bold capitals, not underlined and should not (if possible) run over one line and use present tense. A useful tip is to look at the way editors write headlines in the national papers for ideas.

3. A **subhead** is a remarkably useful tool, yet press release writers usually overlook it. The press release



subhead gives you the opportunity to further attract your journalist.

4. The **introduction** needs to include the essential facts of the story: Who, What, When, Where and Why. A journalist will often only read the first paragraph when deciding whether to cover the story or not. This means it needs to be clear, concise and well written. An introduction of more than a couple of sentences is likely to put off a journalist all together.

5. The **body** of the story is the paragraphs that follow the introduction, they should expand upon the story. Start with the main point, then add the supporting details and always end with the least important points. Make it easy for journalists to understand why they should be writing about your subject. Try not to let the details run over one page. Once again too much information will just deter the journalist. It could also be argued that if you have written as much as two pages you are probably waffling anyway. Try to include a supporting quote or summary comment from a provincial officer or a relevant representative as that helps put in some perspective. Remember, journalists almost always include supporting quotes in their articles - the job of the press release is to provide the reporter with the tools needed to write a feature on your story.

6. It is important to include a section at the bottom, which is referred to as the **notes to editors**. This section allows you to include any background information on your lodge or the freemasons in general. This section is not intended for publication but is a source of reference for journalists.

Content

Only use information that is relevant to your target publication. News stories that are inappropriate to a target publication will be ignored and often infuriate the

journalist.
writing the
release
think of the
media, a



When
press
always
target
public

relations practitioner should look at the stories that the chosen publication runs and the tone of language etc that it uses, prior to writing the release.

Layout

- Make sure that it is clearly identifiable as a press release
- Put the release date on the top and the name of your organisation (i.e. provincial lodge)
- Double space the copy
- Always write in the third person
- Do not underline anything
- Type on one side of the paper, if there is a second sheet, type MORE at the foot of the first page.
- Number each page 1 of 2, 2 of 2 etc.
- At the end of the main body type either END/ENDS or ###
- At the end include a 'for further information please contact...' with your name and contact details.
- ...and remember journalists see dozens of press releases every day so it is important that your press release looks professionally produced and follows the structure.

Do's & Don'ts

Do...

- Put all the facts in the first paragraph i.e. Who, What, When, Where & Why (how)
- Make sure the paragraphs link
- Keep it concise
- Use third person
- Make every word count
- Build up the story step by step

- Think your



about

audience at all times

- Check the release for potential trouble spots
- Include quotes from key people within your organisation and/or people outside your organisation
- Include a NOTE TO EDITOR for minor/technical or further information is needed
- Double check for spelling mistakes
- Offer images if applicable to story.

Don' t...

- Try to hard to write the headline for the journalist
- Use jargon
- Write a release longer than 2 pages
- Note that standard image size for print is 300dpi. Do not offer images unless you have pictures of this size available to send via email.
- Use 'I' or 'we' unless it is a quote

Questions to ask yourself when writing a press release

- Is it really new?
- Is it up front?
- Is it tough enough?
- Any big names involved?
- Does it apply to the reader?
- Who is the audience?
- Have you given anything away that you should not have done?

Sending your press release

You have to make sure to send your press release to the right person. If you are faxing the release clearly print the name of receiver on the cover sheet. If you are not sure of whom to send it to, look up the name of the news editor and send it to them. If worst comes to worst, send

it directly to the news desk; this is if you are unable to find a name.

The time
send out the
release is
important,



when you
press
also very
as it is

the difference between success and failure. You want the release to be received when there is less news about and before the crunch for deadlines set in. early mornings are a good time to send out press releases, but try to avoid Friday afternoons and the day before public holidays.

Important rules to remember

- Nationals and regional newspapers - mornings are the best time to send. Never after 3pm as they will be working to meet their 4pm deadline.
- Monthlies - remember that all monthly publications have a 3-month lead-time. For example if you want to get coverage in December you will need to send them your release in September at the latest.
- Weeklies - all weeklies work from a 5-week lead-time.

Remember to follow up your press release with a follow up call to make sure that it has been received and looked at. Your phone call will bring the journalists' attention to your story who may have dismissed it or forgotten about it.

