
PUBLIC RELATIONS

CHAPTER 14

USING TRADE AND BUSINESS MEDIA TO GENERATE INQUIRIES AND SALES IN YOUR MARKETING PROGRAM

Positive news coverage and product reviews in your industry's trade media can boost your company's sales, if you make your public relations program serve the other, more important elements of your company's marketing program.

In many companies, however, public relations is often the most-misused, least effective marketing activity. Next to print display advertising, more companies in trade and business-to-business markets waste more money on ineffective PR efforts than on any other marketing activity.

Public Relations Serves Marketing, But By Itself, Public Relations is Not Marketing

The problem of ineffective public relations is partly caused by inexperienced marketing managers, who mistakenly believe that paying a PR firm to promote the company in trade publications means they are running a marketing program. This condition is aided in part by the egos of CEOs and senior managers, who like to see their names in print, regardless of any measurable sales effect.

Also, because of your inability to control its outcome, PR is the least effective element of your marketing program, compared to other marketing activities. First, PR puts you and your company at the mercy of an editor's decision on whether or not to cover your company's latest news, or new product announcement. Second, even if an editor decides to cover your story, you can't ever know whether this coverage will be favorable, negative, or somewhere in between. Even favorable coverage may not generate additional sales for your company.

Another contributor to ineffective PR is a simple lack of common courtesy and respect for trade publication editors by PR reps at ad agencies and PR firms. Every day, editors and writers receive hundreds of press releases sent by PR firms,

containing announcements that are either not appropriate for the publication, or aren't newsworthy enough to have been turned into a press release in the first place.

Editors and staff writers who receive these press releases and followup phone calls by the reps at the PR firms who sent them, resent having their time wasted, and rightly so. Having had an unpleasant first contact with a company via that company's PR rep, they will not be inclined to look at subsequent press releases from this company in a favorable light.

Benefits of PR and Media Management

All of this, however, is not to say that PR doesn't work, or that it doesn't have its place in your company's marketing program. An effectively-managed PR campaign that leads to a favorable article on your company's new product can produce sensational results, leading to thousands of new prospect inquiries, and setting a positive tone for all subsequent media coverage of your company and its products.

This coverage can be worth many thousands of dollars in free advertising for your company, and, equally important, can attract the notice of other companies seeking joint venture and business development opportunities with your firm. For these reasons, a well-executed, continuing PR program that keeps your company's name and news of its products out there in your market's trade media can be a major benefit. After all, PR is a medium of exchange: Editors, writers, and reporters rely on the steady flow of news announcements from companies like yours to fill their publications, and your company needs coverage of its products or services to supplement its other marketing efforts.

Your company will get PR, whether you want it or not: Even if your company has decided not to have an ongoing PR program, one day an event will occur that affects your company, and the media will come knocking on your door: A product recall, a lawsuit or adverse court decision affecting your company, or any other major event involving your company, either negative or positive, will spark media inquiries. You will then have no choice but to respond, and the truth and clarity of your initial response may mean the difference between a crisis that can be defused, or one that spirals out of control. A company that knows how to manage its media exposure through an effective PR response can neutralize a potentially negative publicity situation, or exploit a favorable PR opportunity.

How Trade and Industry News Is Made

One of the keys to using PR effectively as part of a company's marketing campaign is knowing how news is made in industry publications:

By press release: The press release is the spark that creates news coverage for companies in business-to-business marketplaces. Even though editors complain about the large mass of press releases they receive every day, and

even though they will only cover a small number of press releases sent to them, editors know they couldn't operate without this flow of information. Press release mailings are the key means of distribution that keeps a company's name and product line in front of editors at trade and business publications, and companies keep sending press releases because they know, at some point, this continued exposure will lead to coverage;

By story pitch: Editors and writers also rely on reps at PR firms who call them with a "story pitch," an idea for an article that involves their client company. A PR firm earns its fees by the nature of its relationships with editors and reporters at publications, and by the quality and credibility of the story pitches it makes to editors and reporters on behalf of its clients. If the editor or writer thinks a story idea is newsworthy, or that it addresses an issue that's on-target for the publication, the company (or its product) receives coverage in that publication;

By the writer's initiative: Of course, many of the articles written in publications come about either because an editor assigned the story to a writer or reporter, or the writer came up with the idea on their own. Companies and the PR firms who represent them don't have the power to control the content of articles, but they do have some ability to influence how these articles are written. For example, if it can keep its name and product line in front of the editor and writer at a publication by continuing to send press releases and making the occasional story pitch, a company may stand a good chance of receiving coverage when the writer eventually decides to write a piece on a topic that relates to the company or its product.

There are other, unlikely ways your company can get media coverage: For example, your company could develop a product that becomes a major, industry-changing news event, attracting the notice of the trade media in your industry, without a public relations effort on your part, or your PR firm could dream up a brilliant publicity stunt that gets coverage by its sheer audacity. These events do happen, but they won't provide you with the year-round media coverage your company needs to support an ongoing marketing program.

The only way to get steady coverage that supports your company's sales efforts, is to develop and execute a continuous public relations program that keeps a constant flow of relevant, high-quality press releases in distribution to your industry's top trade media, combined with thoughtfully-developed story pitches to the key editors at these publications.

How to Use PR in Your Marketing Program

Implementing a competent, successful public relations campaign for your company requires hands-on involvement on your part. You may not be involved in the day-to-day aspects of writing press releases, and contacting writers, reporters, and editors in the trade media, but you'll have to know enough about the process to keep it focused

on your company's marketing goals, making sure that your public relations program doesn't lapse into costly irrelevance, as many company PR programs do.

First Principles of Successful Public Relations in Your Company

Execution of your company's ongoing PR program should be guided by three principles:

- **To send out press releases and announcements *only* when your company has something to talk about;**
- **To think of how your press release or announcement will be received by the writers or editors on the other side of the exchange;**
- **To make a press announcement only if the announcement sells your product, or if it can contribute to sales**

As simple and obvious as this advice may sound, the first two points above are the two biggest complaints of editors at trade publications, magazines, newspapers and other media sources concerning company PR efforts. Nothing travels from an editor's desk to their wastebasket faster than a press release that is either not relevant to the publication, or shouldn't have been sent to them in the first place. The third point above, the relationship of your PR announcement to your company's sales, is covered in greater detail in the next section.

Send out a news release only when you have news: Once you've established a PR program in your company, you'll find it becomes very easy to write and distribute press releases to the media. And now that anyone can send a press release by e-mail, where distribution cost is zero, the final barrier to self-restraint has been broken.

At many companies, what happens next is that *anything* that happens becomes another press release, and is distributed to the company's entire media list in a scattershot fashion. While your local business press might be interested in the news that your company won a quality award from a local trade group, *Business Week* isn't. Not every executive promotion, new account, product feature improvement, or sales promotion should be a press release. Even if it is published, chances are that a minor announcement in the back of a trade publication of a new account closed by your sales staff, for example, will only be read by your sales manager and the rep who made the sale. Was it worth the \$1,500 in hourly billing costs from your PR firm to write and distribute the press release? Probably not.

Create a minimum news threshold in your company, and stick to it. Your CEO or senior management may think every minor development in your company deserves a press release, but if you do, you'll soon wear out your welcome with editors in your industry's trade media, and train them to ignore every release they see from your company. Hold your fire until you have something more important to announce to these editors. When you do, they'll be listening.

Think of the Person Who Will Be Reading Your Press Release

One of the quickest ways to lose the attention of trade publication editors and writers in your industry is to do something that wastes their time, slows them down, or otherwise irritates them. Some PR firms are notoriously disrespectful of media people in these ways, and anything that shows a lack of consideration for an editor, writer, or media contact makes it very hard to win them back once they've turned against your company.

Put yourself in the place of an editor or writer at a major trade publication, magazine, or newspaper. In your average workday, you receive scores, maybe hundreds, of press releases. It's clear to you that many of these press releases have been sent to you just because your name is on a PR firm's media mailing list, not in consideration of any relevance to the areas you cover at your publication. Moreover, while you're trying to finish a piece for your publication's deadline this afternoon, you keep getting phone calls and e-mails from PR people asking if you got their press releases.

If you were this editor, wouldn't you appreciate a company and PR firm that didn't waste your time by bombarding you with irrelevant press releases? Wouldn't you want to talk more with PR reps and companies who had press releases and story ideas that would help you in your coverage of the industry? Much of this boils down to common sense, but you'll be surprised how looking at your news announcements from the other guy's perspective can improve your press coverage.

Here are some useful guidelines for developing and distributing news announcements for your company's PR programs, as seen from the perspective of writers and editors at trade publications and other media outlets:

Will they be interested? Your first step is deciding who on your media list should get the press release of your news announcement, and who shouldn't. Look at your press release, then look at each editor or other contact on your list: Would your story be interesting to them? Is it something they'd be interested in covering for their readers? If not, then sending your press release to this person is like sending them junk mail—*don't do it*;

Have you filled in the *context* of your story? Editors are always looking for news announcements that key into important business issues in your field, such as hot new industry trends, emerging technologies, productivity, or government regulation of your industry. Your news announcement always gets more attention if you can tie some aspect of it to a major issue everyone's talking about in your industry. For example, if there is a proposed EPA air pollution regulation that has your industry up in arms, and if your company's new product feature can help a manufacturer improve their monitoring or reduce plant emissions, then your new product announcement should be wrapped around this issue. Think of the top issues and trends that everyone's talking about in your industry, and see if your company's news announcement could be credibly linked to one of these issues;

Have you given them all the details they need to write their story? If you've met these first two guidelines, think about everything else the editor or writer needs to write their story, and *give it to them*: Product spec sheets in Adobe Acrobat .PDF format, company history and background, high-resolution product photos on your Web site. Most important, make it easy for the writer or editor to contact you, by putting your personal company contact info on all PR materials.

The next two sections cover the typical company events that trigger news announcements to the trade and business media, and the distribution techniques you can use for each.

Will Your News Contribute to Sales? Deciding What Makes News in Your Company

It's your job as a marketing manager to decide what company developments are newsworthy enough to turn into press releases and story idea pitches for the business and trade media contacts in your industry. Inept public relations programs begin whenever this decision is delegated to your ad agency, PR firm, or marketing consultant, and anything becomes news to justify the PR firm's monthly retainer.

There's no mystery to making the decision on what's newsworthy, since any major development in your company, such as the launch of a new product line, or any major new business initiative, will make itself known, and should always prompt the addition of a PR campaign to your list of marketing projects for this event. The key is to discriminate between the company events that are worthy of aggressive PR promotion as news in your industry, those that should be treated in a more routine way, and those that shouldn't be announced at all. Treating every event in your company as an event that requires your PR reps to hit the phones to press your media contacts for coverage is a waste of your marketing dollars, and wears out your welcome with editors and writers.

An event should be announced as news by your company only if it sells your product, or if it can lead to sales. This is the sole factor you should consider when deciding whether a company event is worthy of a news announcement by your company.

Once you've made this initial newsworthiness decision, you should then consider whether your PR announcement should be handled as a major announcement, or as a less-important, secondary announcement.

Major News Events

If you can envision that your announcement for this event, after being written up in a trade magazine, business publication, broadcast outlet, or newspaper, would be compelling enough to sell your company's product or service directly from the article, you've got a major news event that deserves a strong, dedicated PR effort.

Examples of news events that can lead to sales directly from media coverage are:

Major new product launches: Favorable reviews of new products in trade publications can generate many sales directly from the article;

Major product upgrades and improvements: Likewise, a major upgrade to a product line can generate sales from trade and business media coverage;

New market entries: After initial market testing has been done, a PR program that runs parallel to the launch of your product or service in a new market can also lead to sales and prospect inquiries from readers who hear about your product for the first time.

Secondary News Events

Other events in your company may be newsworthy, but, when covered by the media, may not lead to sales in and of themselves. For example, if you judge that a news announcement, when run in connection with other marketing activities—print advertising, direct mailings, and direct selling—would have a positive, indirect influence only when your prospect sees it running alongside any of these paid promotional efforts, this is an announcement that should be made in a more routine way, with less intensity and cost than a major news event.

Examples of secondary news announcements, where media coverage would only influence sales when helped along by your paid marketing efforts, include:

New promotions, price changes, and minor product updates: Many of the press releases announcing these kinds of secondary news events wind up as two and three-column inch blurbs in the “New Product News” sections at the back of trade and industry publications, and may spark readers to contact your company for further information. Because they usually happen more frequently in your company than major news events, they may well account for the majority of your day-to-day PR efforts. If your promotion, price change, or update is significant, or is noteworthy in some other way, your PR rep can also follow up with a phone call to the publication to jog the editor’s attention;

Noteworthy new product applications: New, novel, or unique uses of your product in your industry make interesting stories in trade publications. Make sure your press release has some good quotes from this new application’s users, along with product photos and other information helpful to editors writing the story;

Major new account sales: Issuing a press release whenever your company closes a major sale, or lands a big, well-known customer, is another secondary PR opportunity, because news of your company landing a big new account with a major company in your field may attract notice from other large prospects in your industry. You can sometimes get the larger, more well-known company

to issue their own press release on this announcement to their media contacts; if the other company is big and famous enough, this may lead to even wider media coverage for your company in general business publications;

New survey, report, or white paper: If it addresses a hot industry issue or market trend, a news release reporting on the results of a market survey conducted by your company (or research by an outside industry research firm paid for by your company) can be a sure-fire news opportunity. For example, information obtained by surveying your customers for their opinions on an important industry trend, or polling them on their major applications for your product, can be turned into a press release if it generates interesting and newsworthy results. If you're working in a technology-related field, intriguing reports or white papers written by your company's research staff on the technology or processes underlying your company's products are always well-received by the trade media, and helps to position your company as a thought leader and innovator in its field.

News that Doesn't Lead to Sales

The following news events inside your company do not generate sales, and should not be a part of your company's press release program:

Executive promotions: Press releases accompanied by head shots of executives who've been recently hired or promoted may make it into the back pages of a trade publication, but these announcements don't increase your company's sales;

Charity involvement or sponsorship: Companies often issue press releases touting corporate sponsorship or participation in charity and fund-raising events. Announcements of these events don't increase sales, and sending press releases out on them is a luxury your company can't afford.

Judge the importance of every news event in your company and assess whether or not its publication would realistically lead to, or influence, sales for your company. If not, you should kill the announcement and focus on your paid marketing efforts until you can develop a promotable news event for your company.

How to Write a Press Release (or Manage Those Who Do)

The press release is the key deliverable of every public relations project. A well-presented, well-written press release plays a major role in convincing media contacts to cover your news announcement, and provides the essential information editors and staff writers need to cover your announcement in their publications.

A press release has a formal structure governed by well-established writing rules. These guidelines mirror those of the "Five W's" of writing for newspaper reporters:

“Who, What, When, Where, and Why.” A good press release should read like a brief, well-written newspaper article, giving the reader the basic information on the news announcement in the first paragraph, then drawing them into the rest of the story with the use of interesting factual statements that fill in the outline created by the lead paragraph.

Like any front-page newspaper story, a press release never draws attention to itself, for example, by using the overtly promotional language that belongs in your company’s sales brochure. Instead, your press release serves as the objective *platform* for conveying the essential facts of your company’s news announcement to the reader as quickly as possible.

While you may not be responsible for writing press releases in your company, you will need to know how to develop and execute PR projects as a part of your marketing program. To do this, you must be able to specify the *essential content* that must go into a press release for any company product announcement or news event. This way, you can supply your ad agency, PR firm, or marketing consultant with the information they need to write a press release that accurately communicates your company’s news announcement.

Turning Your Company News Into a Press Release

Before outlining the information required for your press release, think about how your news announcement will be seen by the editors or writers at the publications receiving your press release.

1. Think Like an Editor

Put yourself in the place of an editor or a writer for a trade or business publication in your field. Every week, they receive hundreds of press releases from companies just like yours, touting new product announcements, minor and major product upgrades, and other corporate and industry news, both large and small.

While there may be many exciting details about your new product announcement, product upgrade, new joint venture or other company news event, they can’t all be instantaneously understood by an editor, writer, or reporter at the publication contacted by your PR firm.

To enhance the editor’s understanding of your news announcement, distill your announcement into a single fact that is compelling enough for the editor who reads your press release to decide to cover your story, and then give the editor the additional facts that they will need to make the story interesting to their readers.

Questions editors ask: When an editor scans your press release for the first time, they put it through their own mental screening process, asking the following questions:

“Who are these guys? Have I heard of this company before?” Editors are very status-conscious when it comes to companies. News announcements from big, high-profile companies grab their eye more than releases from small and mid-sized ones. This automatically puts most news announcements from smaller companies at the bottom of their heap, unless the editor has been seeing a steady stream of relevant, interesting press releases coming from your company. This is what you need to be doing anyway, and it will help you overcome this hurdle and get your company noticed more often;

“Does this have anything to do with anything I’m working on right now?” After scanning the headline and lead paragraph of your release, every editor runs it past their own mental list of the stories they’re working on for the next issue of their publication. If they’re writing a story on Web security for the banking industry, and you’re announcing a new Web-based secure account transaction system, you’re in luck. Otherwise, your release goes back to the bottom of the stack, or into the back pages of the publication’s “New Products and Services” section as a three-paragraph filler item. A skillful PR firm with reps who are in constant contact with the top editors and writers in your field will often know who’s working on what, and can figuratively walk a press release right into the staff writer’s story, if it fits;

“Hmmm. [trend or issue] is a hot topic with my readers. Maybe I’ll look into this some more.” Editors and writers in any industry always follow the same new trends, issues and developments. For example, if there’s a string of major oil refinery fires, then, one after another, oil industry publications will write stories on refinery fire prevention systems and related safety issues. The high-tech press is also well known for talking up certain technologies, communications protocols, and programming languages in lockstep, and then moving on just as quickly to the next hot new technology.

Your press release has an excellent chance of getting the editor’s attention if you know the hot trends in your field, and if you can credibly link your announcement to one of these trends. For example, if a big issue in your field, like a dramatic increase in foreign manufacturers’ imports that puts pressure on domestic companies to upgrade their manufacturing efficiency, leading them to buy systems such as those made by your company, your press release should lead with this issue, instead of a being just another plain-Jane new product announcement. However, this linkage must be credible: Editors and writers have finely-tuned “BS detectors,” and they can always spot a company that is using a trend to push a product that doesn’t belong there.

“_____ handles this. I’ll pass it along to him.” One of the primary functions of editors in a publication is to route press releases to the writers who cover certain technologies, business lines, and markets in the industry covered by the publication. You can save a step here by making sure your press release goes directly to the person at the publication who writes about

Figure 14-1

A Few Hints for PR People . . .

by Hiawatha Bray
Technology Reporter, *The Boston Globe*

In certain circles, I have a reputation for being rather harsh to PR people. Well, sometimes. The ones with a proven knack for doing their jobs badly do get on my last available nerve. The good ones, however, are a joy to work with, and they make my life far easier.

So which do you want to be—a good ‘un or a bad ‘un?

I thought as much. That’s why I’m going to help you out, with information about what to do and what not to do if you want me to write about you or your company.

First and foremost, don’t phone the Globe at 5 pm with some bright idea for a red-hot feature. I work at a morning newspaper. By mid-afternoon, I’ve got better things to do than listen to your pitches.

In the morning, however, I don’t at all mind listening. Well, maybe I mind sometimes, but don’t worry. I’ll get over it. So if you want to call, do it early rather than late.

In any case, you’re far better off sending e-mail to bray@globe.com. For one thing, you can provide details that’ll help me decide whether you have an interesting story. For another, I’ll have a semi-permanent record of our interactions. I often forget about phone calls. I forget about e-mails too, but I can look them up and refresh my memory. So use e-mail. Don’t write it in HTML, either. Just plain old ASCII text for me.

And don’t phone me after sending me the message. I’ll get back to you, if it strikes me as worthwhile. If not...better luck next time.

Some of you send me snail-mail press releases. Who reads such dreck? Not I. In this business, a postage stamp is God’s way of telling me it’s not important. If it really was important, you’d have phoned or e-mailed or even faxed. (The number is 617-929-3183.) I usually throw away mail without even peeking, unless it’s a magazine.

So use e-mail. But don’t use attachments unless I’ve agreed to accept them. Just put your pitch into plain old ASCII text and send it along. From time to time, you may feel obligated to send something a bit bulkier. Write me a plain e-mail first and try to talk me into it. Attachments are usually a waste of bandwidth and time.

Especially if they’re really, really big. I’ve had people send me multi-megabyte PowerPoint slide shows once too often. I already hate PowerPoint—the focus of evil in the modern world—and PowerPoint slides glued to e-mail messages are even worse. Don’t you dare attach something like that to an e-mail addressed to me. It’ll go straight into the bit bucket.

You should include lots of contact information—phone, e-mail, pager, cell phone, preferably posted at the top of the message. If you can attach a vCard, please do. Some journalists don’t care for them, but I like ‘em fine. With a click, I can plug them into my address book for future reference. And if you’ve got sense enough to use vCards, I may well want to keep you as a future reference. I always did like people with brains...

By the by, why do so many corporate Web sites lack basic contact information, or bury it in an obscure spot? Time and again, I visit sites, hoping to write about a firm, only to find that their Web site has no phone number listed, or an e-mail address or even the name of a contact person. So I shrug, decide they don’t want any media coverage, and find a more informative firm to write about. Such a fate could well await your company if you don’t put this kind of contact info in an easy-to-find location on your site.

As a matter of fact, a good corporate site should include other goodies, like names and bios of the top execs and downloadable high-resolution photos of the firm’s products.

Now, about your pitch. If you don’t know what the heck it is you’re talking about, how will I? Understand your product or service, and explain it to me in a sentence. And be sure that sentence appears in the first paragraph of your message—or at least the second. Don’t waste my time with a cute lead-in, just get to the point. Remember, that’s how newspaper people write, by putting the key information at the top of the story. Go and do thou likewise.

And of course, don’t bother me with a pitch for a story that would never, ever appear in the Boston Globe. This is a newspaper, not a technical trade rag. Your hot new breakthrough in supply chain management may wow them at the next convention of the International Warehouse Logistics Association, but the readers of the *Boston Globe* won’t give a rip. So keep it to yourself, okay? Unless it’s that rare situation where an obscure innovation really would matter to our thousands of ordinary readers. In that case, give it a shot. The worst that can happen is that I’ll mock you and make disparaging comments about your ancestors.

This guide to the perplexed is a work in progress. I’ll probably add more brilliant insights in days to come. But if you follow the advice contained herein, you won’t go too far wrong.

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the area covered by your product. During their follow-up calls or e-mails to the publication, your PR rep can locate the right person at the publication who should be receiving your press releases;

“Everyone knows that _____ . How is what you’re doing any different than this?” Working for a leading trade publication exposes editors and writers to everything that goes on in their industry—good, bad, and ugly. This exposure often causes editors to form cynical opinions on industry issues and trends, based on the new events they’ve already covered up close in the past. If a company recently failed in a major market push with a product or technology somewhat similar to yours, the editor may well write off your product announcement in this light. You must anticipate the common objections, both fair and unfair, that editors and writers may have to your news announcements, and get these responses out there in the press release, and positioned so they can rationally counteract the prejudices of editors and writers at these publications.

If your press release contains an important single fact, or **lead**, that passes the editor’s mental gauntlet—and especially if you can link your news announcement to a hot trend or issue in your field—you’ll put your press release ahead of the many others that land on the editor’s desk or e-mail every day.

2. Answer the Big Questions

Start the process of sketching out the content and positioning of your press release by answering the important background questions on the news event you’re planning to announce. The answers to these questions will help you and your ad agency or PR firm write a better press release—and helps your PR rep do a better job when they follow up with their media contacts by phone, or by e-mail.

Who is your company, where is it located, and what did it just do?

Start with the simplest questions. Briefly describe, in general, what your company does, where it’s based, and your news event. This brief thumbnail description of your company begins to position your company in the editor’s mind:

“Dyalogix, Inc., of Houston, TX, one of the largest suppliers of electronic building security systems for the banking industry, today announced the introduction of...”

“Tricon Systems, of San Jose, CA, supplier of smart-card verification hardware and services, announces the release of Version 8.0 of its popular...”

What is it most single important thing about our announcement that readers need to know?

Focus on the single most important fact that readers need to know about your company news announcement. For example, if you're introducing a new product or service, what is its single most important and unique feature? In what way does your product make a dramatic improvement in some aspect of the potential customer's business? If you're announcing an upgrade to a product, state the most important aspect about the upgrade: Is it the first time this new feature has been introduced to the market? Is it now available at a lower cost? Is there no other feature like it available in competing products?

What are the main benefits to readers of your news announcement, and why are these important?

Once you've created the "news" of your announcement, fill in the reasons *why* this news is important to readers of the publications in your industry. **DO NOT** make the common mistake of recycling the sales copy benefits in your company's product brochure. This will make your press release read like marketing copy, and marketing copy cannot be easily re-written into a business news feature.

Instead, talk through each of these reasons in a low-key way, as if you were a third-person observer. Here are three different examples:

"...by giving plant operators more immediate response than previous models, the Dymax 4000 switch controller saves up to 6% on bulk liquid materials cost, according to the company."

"...the company's new scoring system allows insurance underwriters to quickly and inexpensively screen large commercial property portfolios for their potential environmental risk, to select only those properties requiring further investigation, and minimizing the high cost of on-site environmental surveys."

"...the new system generates higher injection pressure and provides more accurate control of very small volumes of fuel, allowing for better engine combustion and cleaner diesel engine operation."

Describe each of the main benefits of your news announcement in a detached, factual manner. Conforming to this business news-writing style makes it easier for writers and editors to adapt your press release to their own publications. At the very least, even if your press release is not picked up for a feature article, producing it in virtually ready-to-print business news-writing style makes it very easy for a writer or editor to lift the text of your press release wholesale and publish it as a smaller piece in the "New Product News" section of their publication, which is often done for news announcements not deemed important enough to become standalone news articles.

What is the context of this announcement? How does it fit in with your industry, and your competitors?

Now, put your news announcement in perspective, by positioning it within the context of your industry, and your competition. How beneficial is your product improvement to the industry? Is it substantially better than, or different from, products offered by your competitors, and, from a strategic basis, how does this put your company ahead of your competition?

What you are looking for is a high-concept statement that will make editors stop and think about how your news announcement fits in with the changes occurring in the industry. As mentioned earlier, if you can link your news announcement to a significant market trend or other industry issue, here's where to do it:

“...the company's clean-burning diesel engine technology helps vehicle manufacturers meet increasingly strict Federal and state emissions standards.”

“...the system, now available for the first time to the insurance industry, puts powerful database risk screening capabilities within reach of every property transaction.”

“For long-range future technologies such as fuel cells, Hyperdrive technology is fully compatible and represents a natural evolutionary step...”

“Lenders may face increased potential environmental liability risk as a result of a recent federal appeals court ruling....”

3. Press Release Lead Paragraph


The lead paragraph, or “lead,” is the most important part of your press release. It boils down all of the essential facts of your news announcement into a concise paragraph containing all of the required Who/What/When/Where/Why information, fully summarizing the entire press release.

The lead of a press release should be so self-contained that it would give a reader the gist of your news announcement, if it were to be lifted from the rest of the press release and printed by itself. In fact, lead paragraphs for press releases are intended for this purpose, allowing editors and writers to literally copy and paste the first paragraph of a release into one-paragraph news announcements for their publications.

The lead paragraph of your press release should be written to conform to the standard press release format shown in **Figure 14-2**. However, when you're sketching out a lead for your company's press release that will be rewritten by your ad agency or PR firm, you only need to combine the notes you've already jotted down in the four previous steps:

Figure 14-2:

Press Release Structure—Key elements of a one-page press release

	<p>PRESS RELEASE</p> <p>FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: June 24, 1994</p> <p>CONTACT: Glenn Hanna, Vice President, ERIIS: (703) 836-0402</p>	<p>Environmental Risk Information & Imaging Services</p> <p>505 Huntmar Park Drive, Suite 200 Herndon, VA 22070 Telephone (703) 834-0600 1-800-989-0402 FAX (703) 834-0606</p> 
Contact Info		
Headline	New Environmental Scoring System Helps Lenders Assess Risks On Large Property Portfolios	
Lead Paragraph	<p>Environmental Risk Information & Imaging Services (ERIIS) of Alexandria, Virginia, an industry-leading supplier of property-specific environmental due-diligence information to the engineering, financial, legal, insurance, investment and real estate markets, has introduced a new environmental information service and property scoring system which allows lenders, insurance underwriters and other holders of large real estate property portfolios to quickly and inexpensively screen multiple properties for potential environmental liability risk.</p> <p>This new service, called the ERIIScore Environmental Property Portfolio Report, is available in print, FAX and electronic delivery formats, and depicts each of the many different properties in a real estate portfolio relative to their proximity to different types of potentially hazardous registered Federal and State sites.</p> <p>A new environmental risk scoring system developed by the company, called the ERIIScore, calculated for every property in a portfolio report, is a weighted-average index of the number of potentially hazardous sites, the nature of these sites, and their distance from each specific study property address in the portfolio report. An ERIIScore is also calculated for four additional sites related to each portfolio property, each at a one-half mile distance along the north, south, east, and west axis from the portfolio property. These four "Neighborhood ERIIScores" provide a useful basis of comparison to judge a selected property's relative risk potential to other sites in its area, as well as to other properties in the portfolio. A neighborhood ERIIScore which is higher or lower than the portfolio study property's ERIIScore indicates a positive, negative, or neutral relationship of the portfolio property to its immediate surrounding area. The ERIIScore is designed to measure comparable risk potential, as opposed to contamination levels of selected properties.</p> <p>Lenders may face increased potential environmental liability risk as a result of a recent federal appeals court ruling striking down a prior exemption granted to commercial lenders by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. This ruling has created some confusion in the lending, insurance and real estate development fields as lenders, insurance underwriters and attorneys seek out new ways to defend their interests against the potentially increased threat of Superfund site cleanup expenses.</p> <p>By using environmental risk information services such as the new ERIIScore Portfolio Report, lenders can quickly and inexpensively screen large portfolios for potential environmental problems using information which conforms to industry defined standards. For example, a bank can use ERIIScore Portfolio Reports to screen trust or loan properties in its various portfolios to "select out" only those properties which may require a more detailed review by an environmental engineering professional, thus minimizing the costs of environmental site assessments. Rating agencies and insurance firms can use ERIIScore Portfolio Reports to screen and compare property portfolios prior to securitization or the underwriting of environmental liability insurance policies. Developers can use ERIIScore Reports to screen potential development properties prior to purchase.</p>	
Closing	<p>For more information on the new ERIIScore Environmental Portfolio Property Report and ERIIS' complete product line of environmental information and mapping services, call Glenn Hanna, vice president, ERIIS at (800) 989-0402.</p>	
Backgrounder	<p>Company and Product Background — Environmental Risk Information & Imaging Services:</p> <p>ERIIS is one of the industry's leading suppliers of Federal, State and local environmental site assessment and local regulatory records data, mapping, and photographic services to the consulting, insurance, legal and lending industries, as well as providing environmental property reports for residential properties to home buyers. All ERIIS services provide those involved with environmental due diligence, related to property transactions, with the most accurate and timely background information available for their selected property sites anywhere in the U.S.</p>	

- 1.) Who/where is your company**, and what it just did;
- 2.) The single most important fact** about your news announcement;
- 3.) The main benefits** of your announcement, and why/how these are important;
- 4.) The context** of how your announcement fits with your industry and your competition (this is optional for a lead paragraph, but should be worked into the body of your press release)

Press release lead paragraph format: These essential facts can now be re-written by you, or by your PR firm, into a single press release lead paragraph that strings together the information above in the following order:

- **Who/Where:** “Company name, of city, state” from **1.)** above;
- **What:** Brief background description of your company, from **1.)** above;
- **When:** News action—“announces/has now introduced...” etc. from **2.)** above;
- **Why:** Single most important fact from **2.)** above;
- **How:** Main benefits from **3.)** above;
- **(Optional):** Context information, from **4.)** above

Here is an example lead paragraph for a press release, with the “who/what/when/where/why” and factual news information combined into a concise lead paragraph for a press release:

“Environmental Risk Information and Imaging Services (ERIIS) of Alexandria, VA, an industry-leading supplier of property-specific environmental due-diligence information to the engineering, financial, legal, insurance, investment, and real estate markets, has introduced a new environmental information service and property scoring system that allows lenders, insurance underwriters and other holders of large real estate property portfolios to quickly and inexpensively screen multiple properties for environmental liability risk.”

By itself, the lead gives an editor or writer at a publication enough information about the new product to decide whether or not it’s of interest. The rest of the release (shown in **Figure 14-2**) tells the rest of the story and fills in the other essential product details, applications, and benefits.

If you’re writing your press releases for your company, link to PR Newswire (www.prnewswire.com), to see thousands of examples of press releases for companies in a wide range of industries. Read press releases here for some good ideas and inspiration for writing your own company’s press releases.

4. Filling In the Details: The Body of Your Press Release

After your lead, the body of your press release tells the story of your news announcement by expanding the essential facts summarized in your lead paragraph. If your ad agency, PR firm or marketing consultant is writing your company's press release, they can use your outline notes covered in the previous two sections as background material for writing the final release.

If you are writing your own press release, once you've written a solid lead paragraph, you will find that writing the rest of the release is essentially a process of expanding each of the key facts of your news announcement and arranging them in order of their importance.

The inverted pyramid: Like the "5W's" rule used for writing the lead paragraph of your press release, the format of the body of your release borrows from the "inverted pyramid" newspaper writing style, where the most important fact is discussed in the first paragraph after the lead, the second-most important fact is covered next, and so on.

This writing format puts the most important content of your press release "up front" in the first few paragraphs. Just like it helps busy newspaper readers get the essential details of an article by reading the first few paragraphs, the inverted pyramid style gives busy editors and writers the most important pieces of information in your release quickly, as they decide whether or not to cover your story.

Expand the key facts you've sketched out for your press release: Start writing the body copy of your press release by expanding on each of the key facts—the statements, features, and benefits—you've already sketched out for your news announcement. Answering the following questions about each fact helps you generate the information you'll need to fill in the body text of your press release:

- **How does this fact add value** to your existing product or service?
- **How does this fact help potential users** of your company's product?
- **How do current users benefit** from this fact?
- **Is this fact important to more than one type of user** in your market? If so, who are these other users, and how do each of them benefit?
- How does this fact **add value to your company**?
- **How does this fact make your product or service unique**, or different from, your competitors' products?
- **How does this distinctiveness improve the industry** or marketplace served by your product?

You'll notice some of these questions are variations on the same "What are the benefits?" question, but each are posed in a slightly different way. Writing a specific answer to each of these questions helps you to write about the benefits of your news announcement in a way that goes beyond the promotionally-oriented language of

your company's sales copy, and helps you extract every important detail from each essential fact of your news announcement.

Since these are also the kinds of questions that an editor or reporter at a trade publication would ask you about your announcement, answering them in your press release provides the editor or writer with all the detail they need to help them write their story in a way that's interesting to their readers, increasing the odds that your news will be covered in their publication.

Write these answers out in a narrative form, as if you were telling them to someone sitting next to you. As you fill in the detail, each fact becomes a paragraph of its own. When you read each finished paragraph, certain important points may jump out—a key aspect of your news announcement, or a major reader benefit that an editor or writer should see. These should be moved to the head of each paragraph and reworded to make them into the lead sentences for each paragraph.

After you've expanded each of the essential facts, organize them in your release, from most-important to least-important fact, after your lead paragraph. Next, read your entire press release with "new eyes," as if you knew nothing about your company or product, and you were an editor or writer reading it for the very first time:

- **Do I get the gist of the announcement** from reading most of the lead paragraph, and the first sentence in each of the first few paragraphs?
- **Does it answer the most commonly-asked questions** a reader would be likely to ask about the announcement?
- **Have I made it easy for a busy reader to understand**, by minimizing unnecessary technical jargon, marketing buzzwords, and other barriers to readability?
- **Have I "walked the reader" through my announcement**, clearly presenting each essential fact, eliminating all doubt that any key fact has been omitted, or not explained well enough?

Writing Style Tips for Press Releases

Whether you are writing your own company's press releases, or assigning this task to your outside ad agency or PR firm, here are some additional pointers on press release presentation style:

Write for publication: The more you can make your press release read as if it were a news article, the higher the chance it will attract the notice of the editors and writers who cover your industry. The most effective press releases are written in a dry, factual style, as if the writer of the release was an outsider assigned to report the news your company is announcing. Your press release should read so much like a news article that an editor or writer could lift entire paragraphs from it wholesale and use it in their publications, as many do;

It's news, not hype: Banish all marketing hype, buzzwords, and unnecessary technical jargon from your press releases. Marketing managers and their PR firms fall into the habit of stringing together marketing buzz-phrases into meaningless, shopworn boilerplate. Editors grow tired of reading press releases from “growth-oriented” companies whose products are “industry compliant,” and that provide a “complete solution.” Nothing dooms a company's news announcement more than a press release peppered with wall-to-wall marketing buzzwords.

Writing Your Press Release Headline

The headline is a very important part of your press release. Like a headline to a news story, it is a concise summary of your company's news announcement. When used in a press release, your headline helps the editor or writer at the publication make a quick, yes-or-no decision on whether your announcement falls in their area of interest, and if they should take a closer look.

If you're writing your own press release, write its headline *after* you've written your press release. This way, you'll be better able to distill your news announcement into the single best sentence that describes it, using the fewest words possible.

The most common way to write a headline for your press release is to join the “who/what” parts of your news announcement, as in *who* is the company, and *what* has it done:

- Tyrell Corp. Adds New Imaging System to its VyComp Metallurgical Inspection System**
- Metacortex Announces Windows NT 15.0 Compatibility to its TM Supply Chain Management System**

Another option is to substitute your product or service for the *who*, and then combine it with the *what* that describes it:

- New Cell Phone Accessory Lets Users Make and Receive Wireless Calls from Wired Home Phone Systems**
- New Fuel Cell System Adds Low-Cost Backup Power Options for the Utility Industry**

While the “who/what” method of headline writing is the one used most often in press releases, you can develop some very interesting and eye-catching headlines by picking out and forming different combinations of any two (and sometimes three) of the “who/what/why/how” parts of your press release. Whichever way you go, the most effective headline is usually the shortest one that best summarizes the content of your news announcement.

Other Press Release Elements

To put your press release into final form, add the following elements:

Contact heading and date: Place the following text above the headline of your press release:

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: [Current date here]

Contact: [Your name and title, or PR firm contact name and title]
[Contact phone number and e-mail]

Put the name and phone number of the person responsible for speaking to the media about this announcement. This is usually the PR rep, if your ad agency or PR firm is handling PR for your company; or it's you if you're handling your company's PR effort. The date of your release tells editors and writers how current your announcement is, and serves as a kind of "date stamp" for older press releases posted in the "News" link on your company's Web site.

Contact closing paragraph: As the last paragraph of your press release, let editors and writers know where they can call or e-mail to get more detail on your announcement:

"For more information on _____, call [name, title] of [company/PR firm] at [phone number and e-mail]."

The time when a busy editor is working against a same-day publication deadline and wants to cover your news announcement always seems to be the time when they've lost your contact information, so make sure to include it as the last paragraph of your press release.

Backgrounder: At the bottom of your press release, and set in small type, print a single paragraph that gives writers and editors a brief, general description of your company, its background, the markets and industries it serves, and any other information that fills in the details on your company and its product line (see bottom of sample press release in **Figure 14-2**).

Length of press release: Generally, a press release should fill just one side of a letter-size page (about 500 words). Any longer than this, and it's likely that only the first page will be read.

Quoting company executives in press releases: When quoting executives for company news announcements, many PR firms literally fabricate quotes from company executives in the press release. Editors and writers can always spot a ghost-written quote, so this is always a mistake, because it weakens the credibility of your company's news announcement.

If you need a quote for your press release, have your PR rep conduct a brief interview of the company executive in charge of the topic covered by your news release, asking for his or her comments on the announcement, just as a reporter would. This gives your press release the authenticity it needs, and communicates the

executive's sense of enthusiasm and excitement on the news announcement in your press release.

Developing Media Contact Lists

Every effective PR effort begins by developing and maintaining up-to-date media contact lists for your company. Where you focus your PR efforts with the announcement of your company's new product launch or other news event determines whether or not these efforts will have an impact on your company's sales.

Whether you're handling public relations on your own for your company, or if this task is being handled by your company's outside PR firm, concentrating your efforts on the trade media publications in your industry that can give you the highest likelihood of media coverage is a critical part of any public relations effort.

Your Media Contact List

Your company's media contact list consists of the editors, writers, and reporters who will be receiving your company's press releases and story ideas for news events announced by your company, and is organized as follows:

Top trade media contacts: The smallest list, but the most important one. These are the editors and writers at the major, vertical-market trade publications for your industry or market, who are most likely to cover your company's news announcements on a consistent basis, and includes editors and writers who have already written about your company and its products. If you are handling PR for your company, you'll be talking to these contacts every time your company has a significant news announcement. Otherwise, your PR rep will be in contact with them as a part of your ongoing PR effort;

Business media: Beyond your top trade media contacts, you (or your PR firm) should compile a contact list of editors and writers in the general business media. These contacts include general-interest business publications, such as *Business Week* or *The Wall Street Journal*, as well as editors at more specialized business publications indirectly related to your industry, who may be worthwhile media contacts, depending on your news announcement;

Local business press: Business editors, writers and reporters for local media outlets in your city may be interested in news about your company and its products. Generally speaking, local media coverage has less sales impact than national coverage in trade or industry-specific publications, but it doesn't hurt to include the local business press for certain announcements, if appropriate;

General media: Because it's highly unlikely they will cover your trade or industry news announcement (and even more unlikely that such coverage will lead to sales), you probably won't have a need to develop press lists for general-interest media outlets, such as newspapers, consumer magazines, or

local broadcasters. These media outlets do not cover specialized company and product announcements unless your product and its underlying technology have a broader appeal to their general-interest audiences;

Media “targets of opportunity:” Occasionally, there may be a news event in your company that requires you to develop a specialized media contact list. A push into a new market or industry, or a product launch in an entirely new market, is often accompanied by a PR effort directed to the trade and business media covering this new market. You can use outside sources, such as Bacon’s, and Standard Rate and Data Service (SRDS), to develop media contact lists for any industry or market (more on this further in this section).

Making personal contact with your media list: The level of personal contact required to follow-up with each group of contacts on your media list depends on their closeness to your industry, and the significance of your news announcement. For example, with a major new product announcement or product upgrade, you (or your PR firm’s rep) will likely follow up, by phone or e-mail, with everyone on your list of “top trade media contacts,” after they receive your press release.

Other contacts who receive the same press release, such as general business media writers or reporters, usually won’t receive a follow-up call, since it’s less likely they will be interested in covering your story. Nonetheless, the goal here is to keep sending your press releases to these broader media contacts to keep your company’s name and products in front of them, so they’ll remember your company on the day you have a news announcement they do decide to cover.

Regardless of who’s responsible in your company for day-to-day implementation of your company’s public relations program—you, or your outside PR rep—as a marketing manager, you should always make it a point to establish working contacts with the top trade publication writers and editors in your industry. You’ll never know when you’ll have to talk to a trade publication editor to pitch a story idea (more on this in the next section), or when you may have to pre-emptively call a staff writer to head off a potentially harmful negative review of one of your company’s products.

Compiling Your Company’s Media Contact Lists

If your ad agency, PR firm, or marketing consultant is handling your PR program, they will likely be responsible for developing your company’s media contact lists, (using the methods described here), or working from their existing contact lists established by developing prior relationships with media contacts in your field. Either way, you need to know who’s on your company’s media contact list, and who’s receiving a press release for your news announcement.

Creating your company’s own media contact list is both a process of compiling your own lists, and obtaining media contacts from outside sources, such as Bacon’s or Standard Rate & Data Service (SRDS). This section details the key steps for compiling your company’s media contact lists, for each category of media contact previously described.

Establishing Top Trade Media Contacts

This media contact list contains your most important contacts for the trade and industry publications read by customers and prospects in your marketplace, and constitutes your “A” List of top contacts. If your company has already been covered in any of these publications, the writer of the previous article should be your primary media contact there. These writers will have a natural interest in receiving any new announcements from your company, so they are your best contacts at these publications.

When in doubt, go to the managing editor: If your company is new to PR, and has not yet received coverage in your industry’s trade publications, check the publication’s editorial masthead (found within the first few pages in the front of the publication) and locate the publication’s managing editor (see **Figure 14-3**). Managing editors serve as gatekeepers for deciding what stories get covered, who covers them, and for pushing these stories into upcoming issues. When the managing editor receives your company’s press release, they’ll route it to the person at the publication they feel is most qualified to write about it.

If you’re developing your company’s own media contact lists, it’s a good idea to contact the managing editors at these publications to introduce yourself, and describe your company and its products to them. In public relations, personal contact always improves your chances of getting coverage, so it’s always a good idea to get to know who will be covering your company at the publication. Ask the managing editor who should receive your news announcements at their publication; this person, and the managing editor, should then receive press releases for all of your company’s subsequent news announcements.

“New product news” sections: Many trade publications also have an editor in charge of the “new product news” sections in their publications (see **Figure 14-4**). These new product sections feature small, three column-inch blurbs, often accompanied by small product photos submitted by the company with their press release. Many new product announcements end up here if the managing editor doesn’t think the press release announcement warrants a standalone article. It’s likely that many of your company’s new product and product upgrade announcements fall into this category, so it’s better to send them directly to the “new product news editor” at the publication, and get some minor coverage for them, than it is to try for bigger story placement with an announcement that (at least in the editor’s mind) doesn’t deserve it.

Figure 14-3:

Media Contacts

When in doubt, send your company’s press releases to the Managing Editors at the trade publications on your media contact list. These contacts are found on the masthead at the front of the publication

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The Audit Bureau

Figure 14-4:

New Product News Sections—A useful source of sales leads for your company's new product press releases

New Product News Sections, found in many trade and industry publications, give your company's products or services valuable free media coverage, and generate sales leads from interested readers of these publications

DISPOSABLE GAS MONITORS

Introducing a line of personal sized single gas monitors that the user disposes of when the battery and sensor have exhausted their useful life. The Oxy Beep and Toxy Beep are economical single gas diffusion style oxygen, hydrogen sulfide, and carbon



one full facepiece respirator with optional donning feature and is available with aluminum, hoop wrapped or full wrapped cylinders. **North Safety Equipment, Cranston, RI, 401-943-4400.**

PORTABLE FID

The new portable Flame Ionization Detector (FID) is intrinsically safe for use in hazardous areas rated Class 1, Div. 1, Groups A, B, C and D. The FID allows you to detect and monitor low levels of hydrocarbon gases in virtually any hazardous area. In addition to the intrinsic safety cell, the FID also incorporates several other safety features such as low temperature control systems which will shut down the FID if the temperature exceeds a safe level or if the ambient hydrocarbon levels exceed 10% LEL. **Sanadiplex, Inc., Cranston, RI, 401-943-4444. CIRCLE 268 ON CARD FOR INFO.**

PORTABLE FID

The new portable Flame Ionization Detector (FID) is intrinsically safe for use in hazardous areas rated Class 1, Div. 1, Groups A, B, C and D. The FID allows you to detect and monitor low levels of hydrocarbon gases in virtually any hazardous area. In addition to the intrinsic safety cell, the FID also incorporates several other safety features such as low temperature control systems which will shut down the FID if the temperature exceeds a safe level or if the ambient hydrocarbon levels exceed 10% LEL. **Sanadiplex, Inc., Cranston, RI, 401-943-4444. CIRCLE 268 ON CARD FOR INFO.**

CONTINUOUS GAS MONITOR & RECORDER

The GTOX 4000 SafetyGuard is a programmable one to eight channel gas monitoring and



one full facepiece respirator with optional donning feature and is available with aluminum, hoop wrapped or full wrapped cylinders. **North Safety Equipment, Cranston, RI, 401-943-4400. CIRCLE 268 ON CARD FOR INFO.**

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Product News

DISPOSABLE GAS MONITORS

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one full facepiece respirator with optional donning feature and is available with aluminum, hoop wrapped or full wrapped cylinders. **North Safety Equipment, Cranston, RI, 401-943-4400. CIRCLE 268 ON CARD FOR INFO.**

PORTABLE FID

The new portable Flame Ionization Detector (FID) is intrinsically safe for use in hazardous areas rated Class 1, Div. 1, Groups A, B, C and D. The FID allows you to detect and monitor low levels of hydrocarbon gases in virtually any hazardous area. In addition to the intrinsic safety cell, the FID also incorporates several other safety features such as low temperature control systems which will shut down the FID if the temperature exceeds a safe level or if the ambient hydrocarbon levels exceed 10% LEL. **Sanadiplex, Inc., Cranston, RI, 401-943-4444. CIRCLE 268 ON CARD FOR INFO.**

CONTINUOUS GAS MONITOR & RECORDER

The GTOX 4000 SafetyGuard is a programmable one to eight channel gas monitoring and



one full facepiece respirator with optional donning feature and is available with aluminum, hoop wrapped or full wrapped cylinders. **North Safety Equipment, Cranston, RI, 401-943-4400. CIRCLE 268 ON CARD FOR INFO.**

Establishing Contacts in General Business Media

You can repeat the process of checking the mastheads of publications for general business magazines, and in the business sections of your city's local newspapers, to compile contacts for the larger "B" Lists of general-interest business publications.

Both the managing editor and new product news editors should be added to your media contact list for each of these publications. If your company is involved in the high-technology field, add the publication's "technology editor" to your contact list. When adding a contact for your local newspaper's business section, select the paper's "business editor."

Getting broader media coverage: If your company does business in one or more industries or vertical markets, it's likely you'll have to expand the scope of your company's public relations efforts. For example, if your company enters a new market, you'll need to execute a PR program to attract media coverage from trade publications in this new industry. Your company may even have a news announcement that would be appropriate for wider, general-interest media coverage, such as broadcast TV, cable, radio, or daily newspapers.

When you need to expand the reach of your public relations program, the Bacon's media directories (at www.bacons.com) can provide you with full contact information

on newspapers, business media, TV, radio, and any other media source in the U.S. Average cost for the hard-copy Bacon's directories is around \$400 each, but you can order and download specific groups of media contacts from their Web site, using their MediaLists Online service, for a \$100 minimum charge per order.

For most of your company's public relations activities, however, you'll be focusing your efforts on the trade publications of your industry or marketplace. For example, if your company has developed a new model hydraulic pump for industrial plants, it's a safe bet that *The New York Times*, *Forbes*, or *The Washington Post* isn't interested. Keep your program focused on your industry, develop good working relationships with the editors at the top publications there, and you'll get coverage that boosts sales of your company's products.

Fitting Your News to the Size of the Story: Types of PR Announcements

Some PR firms make the mistake of treating every company news announcement, large or small, in the same way. They make follow-up phone calls to busy editors to promote relatively minor company announcements, not realizing that the small amount of coverage that may be generated by their effort isn't worth the strain they've added to their relationships with these editors.

Your company's news announcements aren't all alike, and not every news event from your company should be announced to the world in the same way. So, in addition to maintaining a threshold for "what is news" in your company, you'll have to decide what type of PR promotion to give to each news announcement from your company, and how much promotional effort each announcement deserves.

Minor (secondary) company news announcements: Minor, or secondary, announcements are the "everyday" news events that occur most frequently in companies, and account for the most promotion by companies and their PR firms.

These include:

- **Minor product upgrades**
- **Product price changes**
- **New account sales**
- **Product sales promotions**
- **Industry awards and recognition**

Minor news events are announced by a one-page press release sent either by mail or e-mail, and usually without a follow-up phone call. These announcements usually receive a few column-inches of coverage in trade publications, and many end up as two-or three-paragraph "filler" items in the back pages of these publications. They provide some help to your sales efforts by keeping your company and its product in front of prospects in your industry, but their most important benefit is that they keep

your name in the minds of the *editors* at these publications until your company's next *major* news announcement.

Major company news announcements: Major news events in your company are events that justify coverage as individual articles in publications. Examples of major announcements include:

- **New product announcements**
- **New product reviews**
- **New market entries**
- **Major product upgrades**
- **Corporate mergers and acquisitions**
- **Corporate joint ventures**

Execution of major news announcements ranges from distribution of a press release, with phone follow-up by your PR rep, all the way up to special, big-city news conferences and other elaborate events requiring very sophisticated PR support. However, most major news announcements consist of a press release or press kit mailing (or e-mail distribution) and follow-up contact with editors by your PR firm. Also, "story pitches" may be made to business and trade publication editors to wrap a major industry trend or issue around the company's news announcement (more on story pitches further in this section).

PR announcements of major company news events are also timed to support and to coincide with the execution of other marketing projects, such as a print advertising or direct mail campaign for a new product launch. You can also time major PR announcements for new product launches to coincide with your company's exhibit at a major trade show for your industry, where this product will be introduced.

Execution of Your Company's PR Program

When planning your company's ongoing public relations program, it helps to plan the specifics of each of your projected news announcements out as far in advance as possible, to anticipate and support all of your company's marketing projects.

Plan ahead for major announcements: Since the press release is the main marketing deliverable all PR projects are built around, it helps to think of the major news announcements in your PR program as a series of press release mailings, or "distributions," timed to coincide with your company's major marketing initiatives throughout the year. For example, if your company plans a fall launch of its major product line, you need to have a press release distribution in place to support this launch. Major announcements require more background effort (such as creating and executing story pitches) than minor ones, so give your ad agency, PR firm or marketing consultant enough advance notice so they can prepare for these projects.

Establish “meat grinder” press release distributions for minor announcements:

Your PR program must also provide for the continuous distribution of minor news announcements that need to be written up as press releases and distributed as they occur. These announcements, also known as “meat grinder” press release distributions, are minor news announcements in your company that usually arise immediately, and are handled just as quickly, by a rapid press release distribution to your company’s trade media contacts. Again, the purpose of getting your minor PR announcements out is not so much to support sales (although there may be some effect here), as it is to keep your company’s name in front of editors, writers and other media contacts, so they’ll know who your company is when your PR firm calls them with your major news announcements.

In addition to these minor news announcements, you’ll never know when an exciting new business opportunity or a novel product application in your company will present a useful opportunity for media coverage. These unforeseen events will require you to respond with either a minor or a major news announcement, so be ready to handle these opportunities in your PR program.

Countdown to a News Announcement: Execution Steps for Public Relations Projects

This section is a start-to-finish checklist and summary of the key steps involved in executing PR news announcements in your company.

Is it news?

Whenever a potential company news event presents itself, first decide whether or not it should even be a news announcement from your company. As mentioned earlier, some events, like executive promotions, charity contributions, or minor new account sales, simply don’t justify the time and effort of a press release distribution. An event should be announced only if you believe it can have a positive effect on sales—either directly, by leading to sales from the press coverage, or indirectly, by creating a favorable impression alongside other marketing efforts, such as advertising and direct mail programs.

Is it a minor or major news event?

Judge the importance of the event: Does it justify more attention and effort, such as phone follow-up contacts, or story pitches? PR firms have a tendency to treat every client’s news announcement with the same level of effort, unless you force the distinction. If it’s a minor news event, put it in your “meat grinder”—have it written up as a press release, and distribute it by e-mail to your media contact list, where some of these contacts may decide to cover it in their publications.

Should we use a story pitch?

A story pitch (also known as a “story hook”) wraps your company news announcement inside of an industry trend or issue. For example, if Internet hacker attacks have been in the news, your company’s announcement of its Web server software’s upgraded security features could be presented in the context of the network security issue when your PR rep speaks to an editor at a trade publication. An example of a verbal story pitch for this announcement might be:

“You know, server and network security is a big topic these days, especially in light of last month’s ‘denial of service’ Internet server attacks. The recent attacks on Yahoo!’s site were caused by ____; Rezware’s IBX system prevents these kinds of attacks. If you’d be interested in doing a story on network server security, I’d be glad to supply you with some contacts in the industry who could talk about it...”

Of course, a few of the “contacts in the industry” referred to above would include your company’s CEO or VP of Technology (in addition to some other, more objective, contacts). Many articles in trade publications get published as a result of these story pitches, and editors and writers rely on skilled PR reps to provide them with the interview sources, industry research, and the other key contacts they need to write their stories.

Story pitches are made for significant company news events: These include new product launches, major new business or market investments and initiatives, or major product upgrades. Your PR rep makes the story pitch by e-mail or (preferably) telephone. Of course, when using story pitches, the accompanying press release should specifically address the topic of the story pitch.

Story Pitch Examples:

Most industries have hot-button issues and trends that become the focus of major articles in their publications:

- The quest for higher productivity;
- Increasing plant efficiency;
- More efficient energy consumption;
- Internet privacy and security;
- Using consultants to reduce personnel costs;
- Plant and workplace safety;
- Software moving to Web-based systems and services;
- Effects of growing numbers of seniors in the U.S.;
- Outsourcing to reduce overhead expenses;

- Electronic payment systems;
- Terrorism and domestic security

You can judge the quality of your PR firm by the quality and relevance of the story pitches they use. The best PR firms constantly develop fresh and imaginative story pitch angles featuring your company or product.

Much of what a PR firm brings to its relationship with your company are its own contacts and relationships between its PR reps and their contacts in the media: A PR rep who gets to know which staff writer covers what particular topics at a publication can tailor their story pitches to the interests of that writer or reporter.

Trade publication editorial calendars: Many trade publications plan out their editorial coverage in advance on key industry topics, in their editorial calendars. Story pitches—especially those tied in with key industry trends and issues—can be developed to meet the needs of a publication’s editorial calendar. For example, the cover story and lead articles for three issues of a banking industry publication’s editorial calendar might look like this:

- January:** New trends in Web security
- February:** Smart card technology and consumer acceptance
- March:** Streamlining back-office loan processing operations

Many publications in many different industries publish editorial calendars, usually found in their advertising media kits, detailing the publication’s planned editorial coverage in each issue, by month, up to a year in advance. Thoughtful development of story pitches featuring your product, if they are relevant to the story topics in the publication’s editorial calendar, can open major trade press coverage opportunities for your company.

Trade and business writers appreciate having high-concept “hooks” to write their stories around, such as how your company’s product changes the status quo of the industry, or how your product stands in contrast to your competitors’ products. Even if you decide that a news announcement doesn’t need a story pitch, the press release that covers your announcement should appeal to the desire of editors and writers to exploit conflict, contrast, and change in their coverage of your industry.

Should I give an exclusive to a publication?

Staff writers and editors at one publication compete with other publications to cover the news of their industry. If you have a fairly significant product announcement, such as a new product launch, or an entry into a major new market, you (or your PR firm) may want to consider negotiating for prime coverage in a publication by agreeing to give the writer or editor an exclusive to cover your story. This means that they will be the first and only writer and

publication to break the story for an agreed time period, if you agree to hold off on issuing your broader press release distribution to any other publication until after they publish their story covering your announcement.

Since you can never be certain how much coverage your news announcement will receive, the sure bet of getting prominent coverage in a leading publication is often preferable to the greater uncertainty of taking your chances with broader distribution of your announcement. If you have a major announcement, you can propose this to your PR firm, who can then check with their best contact to negotiate an exclusive on it.

What information do I need for the press release?

As you're planning your company's announcement, you'll need to get started on the press release. If you're writing your own company's press release, follow the instructions in the first part of this chapter.

If your ad agency, PR firm or marketing consultant is writing the press release, provide them with some background notes to sketch out these essential details:

- **Summary:** What your company just did;
- **Main benefits** of your news announcement;
- **Why** these benefits are important to readers;
- **Context** of the announcement—industry and market impact, competitive aspects, etc.

Remember to keep your press release to one side of a letter-size sheet of paper (500 words maximum). The final version of the release includes all of the form elements editors look for—contact information, background paragraph, press release date, etc., covered previously in this chapter and shown in **Figure 14-2**.

What other deliverables do we need along with our press release?

If this is a major news announcement, put together a **press kit** that includes the press release, and all of the additional information editors need to fill in the background detail on your company. Background materials are important additions to your PR program, and should be sent along with your press releases on major news announcements. On minor press releases, these materials should be posted to your company's Web site and made freely available to the media as clickable Web links.

For each news announcement you're planning, think of the other background deliverables to be provided to editors in the press release distribution:

- **Photos:** If you're announcing news about a product launch or upgrade, supply at least one product shot with the release, and make additional

photos available to editors on your company's Web site: Action shots of the product in use, closeups of key features, and any other variations, as needed;

Software: If your company is in the software business, or sells any related electronic or information product, you can provide editors with a CD-ROM containing a demo version of your software, for their review;

Backgrounders: If this is a major company news announcement, include some additional pieces of information on your company, distributed as single-sheet "backgrounders" to your media contact list:

- **Product Q & A:** Answers to most-asked questions about the product;
- **Executive profiles:** Supply a sheet listing brief, one-paragraph profiles of your company's senior management;
- **Company history:** If yours is a long-established company, editors are always interested in seeing some interesting or historic background on your company and its business activities.

Previous major trade articles: Include copies of any major articles previously published on your company or its products: Product reviews, company profiles, business features, etc.

These background materials are a must for any PR program. Put these together at the earliest opportunity, and make them freely available to any media contact.

When do we make our news announcement?

Think about the timing of your announcement. Should it be made immediately, or are there good reasons for making your announcement at a later date? Usually, speed is critical in news announcements: A new product needs to be announced ahead of a competitor's product, or a press release that ties your company's product in with an important new market trend, must go out immediately to capitalize on the currency of this trend.

Trade shows: Delaying a news announcement sometimes provides your company with an added sales benefit. For example, you might consider delaying a major product announcement until the date of an upcoming trade show, to get maximum exposure for your product from the key contacts in trade and business media attending the show. Trade shows are also excellent opportunities to schedule press conferences or other events, to present your company's new product announcement to the key contacts you've invited in advance.

For minor news events, however, it's more important to get the announcement out there in the media as soon as the press release is written, and to keep a steady stream of these minor news announcements flowing, so your media contacts know who your company is when they receive a major news release from your company.

Trade publication editorial calendars: You may also decide to delay the publication of a news announcement so you can present it to an editor as a story pitch for an upcoming issue listed in the publication's editorial calendar. While almost never done for new product announcements, an interesting story idea featuring your company's product can often be held until it's covered in an upcoming "cover story" issue of the publication dealing with the subject or trend matching your story idea's subject.

Unlike other marketing activities, PR is dependent on external, uncontrollable factors, such as the whims and agendas of trade publication editors. Because of these facts, always consider whether a news announcement should be made immediately, or held back for a more favorable time, when it could better serve your company's marketing activities.

Who should be contacted for the news announcement?

Consider the scope of distribution for your company's news announcement. Most industry and trade news announcements are of interest only to those involved in the industry, so should only be sent to media contacts within that industry.

However, if your news announcement has broader appeal, you can include contacts for general business publications, such *The Wall Street Journal* or *Business Week*, in your distribution for the announcement.

Developing story angles that enlarge the scope of your company's products can also help broaden the appeal of your potential media coverage to a wider audience in the general business press. You can often receive broader coverage if you can plausibly tie your company or products to current events or trends having broader appeal in general business life, such as an interesting new technology used to manufacture your product, or a regulatory concern addressed by your company's service.

However, be warned that coverage of vertical-market companies and products in general business publications often has **no impact** on sales of your company's products. The average *Business Week* reader is probably not a prospect for your specialized industrial product announcement, so focus your distribution to the media contacts in your immediate industry, unless your news announcement is either a major industry event, or is interesting enough to warrant space for readers of general-interest business publications.

How should the media be contacted? By mail or e-mail? Should follow-up phone calls be made?

Send minor announcements by e-mail: Editors and writers at trade publications have Internet e-mail, and they check it continuously throughout the day. Press releases for minor news announcements can be sent exclusively by e-mail to contacts on your trade media list, along with a Web link for access to background materials, such as product photos, on your company's Web site. E-mail communications should always be introduced with a short, personal note from your company's PR rep.

Major press release announcements can be sent simultaneously, as both an e-mail communication and a hard copy press kit, which also contains product photos and other background pieces. If your company is in the high-tech field, you are just as well off sending press releases for *every* news announcement by e-mail, since this has become the accepted form of PR communications in the technology trade press.

Follow-up major news announcements by phone: Follow-up phone calls to trade media contacts by your PR firm are an excellent way to promote your company's major news announcements. A follow-up call to jog an editor's memory on the press release that was sent a few days earlier can often move your story higher on the editor's agenda. PR reps can also use follow-up calls to answer an editor's questions, and fill in additional detail on your company's news announcement.

Limit telephone follow-ups by your PR reps only to your company's major news announcements. Follow-up phone calls are unnecessary for minor news events. Editors and writers at trade publications know a minor news announcement when they see one, and they've already made up their mind on whether or not they'll cover your story when they first received your e-mailed press release. They get annoyed when they receive unnecessary phone calls from PR reps following up on a minor news releases, so don't risk turning them off when you'll need their goodwill for your more significant news announcements at a later date.

Where else should the press release be distributed?

As you finalize the essential details of your press release announcement, give some thought to where else your press release can be distributed, in addition to sending it to your media contact lists.

For example, you can send your press release (for an additional cost) to PR Newswire (www.prnewswire.com), a service that distributes your press release to thousands of contacts at media outlets who've agreed to receive press releases from PR Newswire. The PR Newswire Web site has a constantly-updated, keyword-searchable archive of all corporate press releases it distributes, which is sometimes used by editors and writers as an online

research tool to search for background news items on the companies and industries they cover.

In general, you are far better off focusing your PR efforts on your own company's trade media contact lists than paying the extra expense (around \$1,400 per release) to distribute your press release on PR Newswire. While some editors and writers pay attention to PR Newswire releases, they will pay more attention to a press release they receive from your company or your PR firm, especially if this release is followed up with a personal contact. If you have the money in your marketing budget, you can take your chances and put your press release out on PR Newswire, but bear in mind that this is often just a little better than doing nothing.

The final, very important, action step in a PR project is to put your press release up on your company's Web site. If you haven't already done so, create a "Company News" link on the home page of your company's Web site, and use this as your company's online press release archive, arranged by date.

Posting your press releases to your company's Web site can be a tremendously valuable promotional tool for your company: Potential strategic and joint venture partners, key sales prospects at other companies, major customers, media contacts, and others who are interested in your company and its products can learn more about them by reading your press releases here.