Effective PR with Press Releases

10 practical tips from journalists
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International journalist survey

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It pays off to do active PR with press releases

Effective communications with Liana® PRCloud
Press releases are a notable source for journalists when writing the news, and reading press releases is a part of their daily job. Journalists constantly make decisions about which press releases are worth reading and telling about onwards. What should you take into consideration in your press release?

In 2019, we conducted our second international survey asking journalists what they pay attention to in press releases and what kind of press releases they prefer. We also found out how they handle press releases and what their primary sources are. We have gathered the results of the survey in this whitepaper, as well as journalists’ best tips for effective press releases.

This time the survey was completed by 892 journalists and media professionals in six countries: Finland, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Sweden and the United Arab Emirates. Amongst them were editors-in-chief, magazine and news journalists, and freelancers.

The majority of the journalists that answered the questionnaire have a long career in media. Half of the respondents have worked as a journalist for more than 16 years.

Utilizing press releases in their work is business as usual for the majority of the respondents. 85 % of the respondents had read a press release within the last 24 hours. We also saw a notable difference to our previous survey from 2017 in journalists’ activity to utilize press releases. 35 % had utilized a press release in writing an article within 24 hour which shows an 8 % increase to our 2017 survey.

### When did you last utilize a press release in writing an article?

- Within 24 hours: 35%
- Within a week: 28%
- Within a month: 18%
- Within 3 months: 6%
- Within 6 months: 3%
- Within a year: 3%
- It’s been so long I can’t remember: 3%
- I’ve never used a press release in an article: 2%
How to make sure your press releases are read?

Journalists receive hundreds of press releases every single day. That is why we wanted to find out what factors influence whether the journalist reads the press release or not. In the survey we made some statements to the journalists and asked them to rate their importance.

Two factors gained over 90% of votes from all survey respondents and were seen as the most important factors in a press release. 93% of the journalists appreciate a current topic. The clarity of the text in a press release is a key factor for 91% of the respondents.

An engaging headline and proper targeting of press releases were also important factors for journalists. 83% of the respondents stated that it’s quite or very important that a press release is related to their industry or field of expertise and 88% said that an engaging headline is one of the core aspects of a great press release.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Very meaningless or meaningless</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Important or very important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The topic of the press release is current</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The text in the press release is clear and understandable</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The headline of the press release is interesting</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The press release is related to my industry</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The press release is visually clear</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The publisher of the press release is familiar to me</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The publisher of the press release is well known</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The press release is not sent as an attachment</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>53%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
1. Publish hot stories immediately

Speedy press releases are the way to go. Current issues should be communicated to journalists immediately, events on the other hand well in advance. A press release that is related to the industry’s current themes and discussions easily cuts the queue, ahead of other good press releases.

“Press releases should be current, meaning they must be sent to the media well before any given season is already on. When the sent press release is a ready and timely package, the greater the chance that it gets published. Research results are also valuable information that can be used as facts in an article or to depict changing trends, for example.”

Therefore, follow the conversation in your industry and target press releases so that they have a fresh angle on a subject. Remember that journalists don’t want to cover the same stories as all the others so don’t offer them a press release that has been first sent somewhere else and covered by another medium.

“Press releases should be sent to newsdesks early in the morning so they can be covered in the editorial morning meeting.”

2. Write clear and understandable text

Journalists appreciate that a press release is written in a clear and understandable style without excessive marketing blurbs or business jargon. The core message of a press release should be disclosed in the lead.

So go to the point immediately and stick to the facts. Busy journalists often read the heading and the first few sentences of a press release and decide whether to continue reading based on them.

Steer clear from trying to advertise your products or services too heavily in press releases. Our survey respondents were very clear about salesy press releases being a red flag or even being clicked straight to trash.

“A concise press release that goes straight to the point, without unnecessary flourishing, is far better than a painfully long scribble about a subject. One sheet of paper must be enough for your press release.”

A press release should only have one important news tip. It is not advisable to cover several themes in one release. Stay close to the subject and don’t, for instance, go too deep into the background information. Journalists will ask for additional information from the contact person of the press release if they need it.

In our survey, we get a great amount of similar responses from journalists who wanted to remind the senders of press releases about the very basics of what a press release should include. This wave of responses tells us that these are still forgotten by some senders.

“Always include the what, who, where, when, why.”
3. Create an engaging headline

The headline of a press release is usually the first thing journalists read. That is why it deserves your attention. A gripping headline goes straight to the point and succinctly describes what the press release is about. Misleading headlines don’t do anyone any good. In other words, the so-called clickbait headlines should generally be avoided in press releases.

The headline of the press should also be put as the subject of the email that contains it. Emails that only have ‘Press release’ as subject are often left unopened. Over 88% of international journalists felt that the headline needs to be interesting for them to open the press release.

“It must be clear from the headline, within seconds, what the press release is about. The decision whether the press release is interesting must be made with a glance as press releases keep piling up in the dozens during the day.”

“The press release should have a sharp headline. Do the ‘mother test’ for the headline: if your mother doesn’t understand what it’s about, it’s too complex.”

4. Target the right people

Press releases should, from the get-go, be targeted to the journalists that they are relevant to. Press releases shouldn’t automatically always be sent to the same addresses. Instead, put some thought into who might actually be interested in the content.

It also pays off to do some research about the different media you send press releases to. A magazine specialized in electronics is very unlikely publishing your garden-related press release and you hurt your reputation by sending poorly targeted content. Remember quality over quantity in sending and targeting press releases.

Already when writing a press release you should keep the final target, the public, in mind and choose a perspective that might appeal to them. If you want the press release to be published in a local paper, the press release should highlight how it is related to local life.

“Local papers might be interested in the tiniest, seemingly insignificant things, such as photo from a village festival on the previous evening, a charitable donation from a company to an association or duck walking on the town main street.”

“We do read all press releases. If we don’t use yours, it’s because it’s not relevant news for us – cold calling to try and pitch it won’t make a difference.”
5. Choose the right channels

Almost 90% of the respondents state that email is the most important channel for them to follow press releases. Other channels were press release portal, newsroom on organization’s website and social media.

Newsrooms and press release portals are platforms where press releases from a certain organization can be searched and found in one place. Having your press release available in some portal or your company’s own newsroom ensures that your press release can be found even though it wouldn’t be spotted from the journalist’s inbox.

It is also advisable that when you publish a press release, it can be found on your own site. You might also catch a journalist’s attention with your press release on social media.

6. Add contact information and ensure the contact person can be reached

Adding a contact phone number and email address at the end of a press release is paramount. 93% of the journalists that answered our survey state that it is very or quite important that the information of a contact person can be found in a press release. If there is no contact person and the journalist needs additional information, the story might not be written at all.

The contact person needs to be someone that can be interviewed about the subject of the press release and can provide more facts. Thus, the contact shouldn’t be a communications agency or department if these don’t include people that are actively in contact with what the press release is about. Make sure that the contact person knows that they should be available as a media contact and are prepared to answer questions.

Over half of our survey respondents state that they utilize the contact information from press releases quite or very often. That is why these people need to be available right after the press release has been published. Many journalists find it frustrating that the contact people are on holiday, in a meeting or for some unknown reason are not answering their phones when trying to reach them.

If the contact person isn’t available immediately, the time when they will be available should be included in the press release. One option is to add more contact people of which at least one could always be reached by phone.

“The contact person needs to be available for the whole press release publishing day – in the evening as well. It is beyond frustrating to try to get a hold of a contact person who doesn’t answer. Many story details, or even a whole press release haven’t been published because of this on occasion. Because I also train PR people, I formulate it for them like this: the contact person eats, jogs, goes to the sauna, makes love and sleeps with their phone in hand for the next 24 hours!”
How to make your press release more appealing?

A journalist is interested in your press release and has opened it. Then what? What other things should you consider to ensure the release ends up in the news? Keep these four additional tips in mind:

1. Grow your organization’s recognizability

The publisher of a press release being well known or familiar to the journalist influences whether they read the press release or not. What if the press release is from an organization or person that is just starting out in the business? In this case, especially the headline and the start of the press release should be appealing.

The previous tips should also be taken into consideration when drawing up your press release. Even if the first (or many others after that) press release wouldn’t get published you are still gaining recognition among journalists that in the future might contact you for a story.

“I keep press releases archived for future feature, news may inspire me to develop industry-trend or issue-based story.”

2. Add high-quality images and videos as attachments

When asked how much journalists utilize images from press releases, 70% answered that they use these images quite a lot or very much. A press release with high-quality images is more likely going to be published than a press release that doesn’t have any images attached.

“Image or images must be included in the press release, otherwise it will probably not be published. This should be a minimum requirement when publishing press releases.”

The important things to consider with images are download speed and that they are also available in high-resolution (300dpi). Images can also be uploaded to different image banks. Just make sure that the links to the banks work in the release and that you don’t need to log in to use these pictures. Remember to add information about how journalists are allowed to use your pictures and if they need to mention the source or photographer.

All kinds of additional material related to the press release should be added as links. Adding links is worthwhile because, according to our study, as much as 60 percent of journalists utilize these links quite a lot or very much. We noticed that videos were mentioned in multiple answers so utilizing them in your press releases can help you stand out.

“Visuality is important. If your subject could be turned into a professional-looking video, it catches our attention, otherwise it won’t.”
Having made their point about writing clearly, succinctly and to-the-point, journalists also nowadays appreciate when organizations have personality and let it show. Depending on your industry and its conventions, try to break the patterns a bit and even be a little playful, within the limits of good taste. Making a lasting impression can be done with a cleverly fun but professionally constructed press release.

“Be brave and have true meaning behind your text. Stale and tedious business jargon doesn’t belong in press releases even though it technically would meet the corporate standards. Personal point of view and interesting factors define whether a press release is read or discarded.”

“Pay attention to the language of the press release. Perfect grammar doesn’t guarantee good readability. Break conventions. Creativity is rewarded in this case as well.”

4. Be active on social media

Journalists are present in social media and are looking for new ideas to write stories about. They utilize social media in their work in many ways. The survey revealed that top reasons for journalists to use social media are follow up on which topics are relevant, they follow news themselves and look for interesting topics. Only under 9% of all international journalists said they don’t use social media in their work.

Social media is a more relaxed channel and you can show a more informal side of your organization than for example on your website. That is why your company’s or organisation’s interesting stories need to be shared on social media.

“How do you utilize social media in your work?

- I follow which topics are relevant 69%
- I follow the news 62%
- I search for interesting topics 61%
- I search for people to interview 43%
- I search for interesting companies and organizations 27%
- I don’t utilize social media at all 9%
- Something else, what? 5%
From the most popular social media channels, the journalists see Facebook as the most important social media channel. A little over half of the respondents think Facebook is very or quite important source for article ideas. There are some variations between countries. For journalists based in the United Arab Emirates Twitter was quite or very important source for 72.7% of them.

It pays off to do active PR with press releases

Even though a press release doesn’t always end up in the news, there’s no reason to be discourage. A release with all the right elements might not be used for one reason or another. One key thing in writing press releases is to do it actively and regularly.

Nearly 90% of the journalists state that it is quite or very useful that companies and organizations they are interested in send press releases actively even though the releases wouldn’t always be utilized.

“Press releases are a great channel for me to get information about what a certain company does and overall what is going on in the industry. Sometimes a press release can act as a data bank and even though I wouldn’t need it at that moment, I can return to it later. So don’t be depressed even though nothing happens immediately when you send a press release. Marketing with a press release is useless but doing PR is always useful.”

Is it possible to send too much press releases or too often? Yes, if the releases don’t have enough relevant content. “Only send press releases when you actually have something to say”, as one journalist put it.

How useful do you think it is that companies and organizations you are interested in sending press releases actively even if you couldn’t always utilize the releases?

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Quite useful</th>
<th>Very useful</th>
<th>Quite useless</th>
<th>Very useless</th>
<th>I don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blogs</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion forums</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linkedin</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How important do you think the following social media channels are as sources?

- Facebook: 42% Important or very important, 1% Very meaningless or meaningless, 57% Neutral
- Twitter: 49% Important or very important, 4% Very meaningless or meaningless, 47% Neutral
- Blogs: 60% Important or very important, 3% Very meaningless or meaningless, 37% Neutral
- Instagram: 66% Important or very important, 4% Very meaningless or meaningless, 30% Neutral
- Discussion forums: 67% Important or very important, 5% Very meaningless or meaningless, 28% Neutral
- Linkedin: 74% Important or very important, 5% Very meaningless or meaningless, 21% Neutral
Effective communications with Liana® PR Cloud

Liana® PR Cloud is a communications entity that utilizes artificial intelligence and enables truly efficient PR and media monitoring. You find exactly the right audiences for your content, as well as monitor the effectiveness of your communications in real time.

Learn more about Liana® PR Cloud