

Writing a news release that actually gets read

by Loa Fridfinnson



The most important IR tool you'll ever use

Writing a news release that tantalizes the reading audience would seem like an easy task, yet many public companies fall short in this critical area of their communications. Many releases receive a yawn at best from readers and the key questions of who, what, when, where, why and how remain unanswered.

The press release is an important tool used by companies to announce developments, meet disclosure requirements, gain recognition and tell a story in the most engaging manner. In today's information driven society we are exposed to approximately 3,000 sales messages a day. Interruptions in our home, during the morning commute and at the office are delivered in mass amounts of advertising, PR and direct marketing. It is essential to ensure your news gets noticed and cuts through the endless noise.

An effective news release begins with a headline (or "lead") that captures attention. The lead should give the nature of the news in its entirety with the body copy rolling out the details and facts. For example, a promising headline would read, "Silver Eagle Purchases Equipment to Enable Mill Expansion" as opposed to "Georgetown Minerals Corp. has contracted John's Drilling Corp. to Drill the Highly Altered Fault Zone at the Champlain Lake Uranium Property in the Athabasca Basin." The lead quickly tells the story to scanning eyes that summarizes the nature of the news. Details are in the press release – not the headline.

Editors and reporters scan hundreds of press releases a day. As communicators, it is our job to engage them in as few words as possible and keep their attention throughout the story. The most important (and exciting) information should be provided first. After creating a captivating lead and opening paragraph that reports the gist of the news, follow with additional details. Remember to include the company's location (e.g. Vancouver, B.C), date of issue, full legal name, web site, telephone numbers, email address, and, if applicable, the trading symbol(s).

In the first paragraph, skip industry jargon and highly technical details that only your colleagues would understand. Write in a conversational tone and direct it towards your targeted audience of investors, financial professionals and media personalities. Don't forget to keep track of statistical sources and any quotations so you can verify them if asked.

The following paragraphs can be of a more technical or scientific nature. Even if the reader is not a geologist or mining engineer, he or she will still have understood your new release by the non-technical introductory paragraph.

Spelling and grammar are other key elements of a good news release. If you aren't a strong writer, ensure you hire one. Nothing loses a reader faster than poor spelling or grammar issues, so use spell check and have it proofed by people you trust before it goes out over the wire or to the media. Sometimes if you are too close to the material it is easy to overlook errors.

The main elements of a junior mining release are:

- Name of the project and where it is located
- Ownership of the project and terms, if any
- Name the commodity or commodities of interest
- An opening non-technical summary of results provided in layman's terms
- NI 43-101 technical description (further along in news release)
- General company summary (standard boilerplate) at the end in one or two paragraphs
- Concise, clear, valuable information in the entire release (No more than two pages)
- Contact information to reach your investor relations or corporate communications designated person
- A securities disclaimer to avoid any potential lawsuits.

What makes news is a whole other topic. After having written a compelling news release, ensure it makes it into the hands of right person who follows your industry. It should be relevant and not self promotional. The media has their job to do and it is not to promote your company. That is what advertising is for and news releases from your company are supposed to be newsworthy and not some overly promotional 'puff piece.' Unpaid coverage is third party credibility that you cannot buy. Advertising certainly has its place, but if you remember that advertising is what you say about yourself and PR is what others say about you, it will assist with improving your communications efforts.

The media appreciates a story that will keep their readers informed on discoveries, industry events and ripples in the economy. Experts can shed light on a specific topic that is timely. Do not send old news to a reporter. No one likes being cold-called or sent unsolicited sales messages that are completely irrelevant or stale. Reporters, editors and financial professionals are working to achieve a specific goal of providing interesting, informative stories or solid investment ideas.

When *Resource World* magazine's Editor-In-Chief, Ellsworth Dickson was asked what he looks for in a good story he responded, "A press release should be written with enough concise to-the-point information, to give us an idea of the importance of the news, including details such as where the property is geographi-

cally located and its accessibility. We cover the mining sector, so we would consider anything deemed newsworthy or relevant that would interest our readers. The news must have some meat to it and there should be contact numbers available so we can follow up if it is worthy of coverage. It also helps to have professionally taken photographs available as those will be the ones that editors choose to publish."

Lastly, note that news must be quantifiable, meaning there must be evidence to back it up. Can you prove development-related statements made in your release if asked? If not, don't make a claim that will leave you clambering for excuses.

Even with keeping these tips in mind, there are thousands of companies competing for attention. It's a competitive business, but when you write professionally and communicate your story clearly, the media, financial professionals and investors will take notice and relationships can be forged. Remember that under-promising and over-delivering goes a long way in building trust and engaging an audience. ■

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