

[WHITE PAPER]



HOW TO WRITE A PRESS RELEASE

IN THE **DIGITAL AGE**



A tweet might be just what's needed

to draw attention to your news, but a press release is still the Holy Grail for communication and is, dear skeptics, far from dead.

In fact going by a recent survey, nearly 60% of UK journalists said they preferred the traditional press release over other media channels. That being said, writing and more crucially distributing a press release effectively is not as easy as it once was. Real-time news coverage on digital media combined with Google's SEO stipulations have made it harder for a press release to make its way to newsdesks.

Like most things around us these days, time has come for the humble press release to get smart about its approach and find a way around breaking news in 140 characters and the Penguins and Pandas of the search engine world that so often steal its thunder.





The Peg

So let's say your client has just acquired its biggest competitor, or launched a new product into the market and you're in charge of getting the press release out ASAP. What do you do? Not long ago, the answer would quite simply be, collect the facts, relevant quotes and start writing. But now the first thing comms professionals must do is assess who this information is for and why they need it.

A tip to help ease the process is to understand why this news will matter to your audience and the market they address. Try and research similar stories to find out what makes the news for them and make that your peg.

As feature writer of the year David Jones of the Daily Mail told Vuelio: "Brilliant PRs, have full knowledge of what will make a proper story and will only get in touch with you for that. It's about knowing your market and who to pitch what to, and when."

Keyword Search for Content Optimisation

So you've found a newsworthy peg, great but don't get typing just yet. Now starts the search for what others are typing on search engines.

Every change Google makes to its algorithms sends the SEO and PR world into a tizzy. However, if the evolution of Google's algorithm updates have taught us anything it is to understand the changing value of keywords. Once the be-all and end-all of search, SEO has gone beyond stuffing headlines and copy with keywords.

Post Hummingbird, one must tailor their copy for contextual search where not just the keywords but phrases, synonyms and intent around the subject are used – making the content stronger in Google's eyes. An increasingly semantic search demands a more conversational approach.

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Google AdWords Keyword Tool and Google Insights for Search are useful tools to help you achieve good rankings by understanding the popular words and phrases being searched for on and around the topic of your press release. For these keywords use the engines to see posts that have ranked the highest. You can then tweak or try other variations to make your press release more SEO ready.

You can also refer to Google Trends to compare how some keywords fare against others in terms of search volume.



Accompaniments

Decide in advance what you can send with your press release to boost the chance of coverage. Images are a must and reportedly boost visibility by 70% on social channels. Before getting started have a plan in place for the media – be it images, videos, slides or presentation that can make your press release the one stop shop your audience needs to get the story out.

It is for this reason that the demand for digital newsrooms are on the rise. Research shows that 97% of journalists think it's important for organisations to have an online newsroom. Why? Because it helps companies find an integrated approach to content assimilation and distribution across traditional and new platforms.





The articles that do best are not necessarily the best, journalistically - but most often are the stories with SEO-friendly headlines.

Headline

Ditch the wit for SEO. In a recent breakfast briefing hosted by Vuelio, our guest speaker Poorna Bell, executive editor and global lifestyle head of Huffington Post described how the articles that do best on the website are not necessarily the best, journalistically - but most often are the stories with SEO-friendly headlines crafted with a knowledge of what is being searched for online.

The headline should also be devoid of jargon and adjectives - keep it short, snappy and most importantly, tweetable.

The Copy

Now that you have a solid structure in place, the main body text should be much easier to draft. Google prefers posts that are content rich rather than short articles overstuffed with links.

It is advisable therefore to keep your content original and consider trying to reach a target of at least 500-600 words.

Don't keep your readers guessing about why this is relevant to them till the last paragraph. Even if it's big news for your company, start with the peg that will best appeal to your intended audience. Remember to keep the praises and company achievements out of the main body text – it's ignored by journalists anyway, but you do run the risk of the release itself coming across too self-celebratory.

You should focus on creating content that is informative, educational and when possible, entertaining. Strive to solve a problem, address a query or simply arouse reader's intrigue and interest will follow, organically.



Quotes

Stay away from the press release formula of: news, information and three quotes in succession from executives all repeating the same thing. Use only the quotes that add something to the story and weave them into the text.

Again, try and avoid run-of-the-mill quotes such as “I am delighted to announce this strategic partnership...” Instead include the reason behind the change and what it will mean for the industry – make them quotable quotes.

Links

When using keywords in backlinks (links pointing back to your site), Google strongly recommends that the “no-follow” attribute on links are included in your press release. This would prevent your press release and eventually your site from being associated with artificial site promotion in search results, a method strongly discouraged by Google.





Research shows that photos and videos drive the most engagement on social media.

Images

Like quotes, try and send more than just company logos and mugshots of the executives quoted. Research shows that photos and videos drive the most engagement on social media. It is therefore important to think of new and innovative ideas on how the news can be conveyed visually across platforms. Also a zip file or online file sharing platform like Dropbox eases the weight of your message while allowing readers to decide what's right for their network.

Newsrooms are an ideal way for marketers to create an environment which is easy for consumers, influencers and journalists to find and share the story from one platform.

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Contact Information

It's wonderful to have a large team of dedicated professionals but keep the contact information strictly action related. A single email that is likely to be picked up by the team if you are not at your desk and similarly a number will do better than complicating the process with a long list of contacts.

To ease the process, a direct email or when possible a number for the experts quoted in the press release or first point of contact at the company in question is helpful for the media to get the information they need as soon as possible.

Press Release Distribution Sites

Many press release distribution websites that disregarded Google's earlier guidelines on the consequences they can face if they continue to produce spammy content were hit by the Google Panda update earlier this year, witnessing a significant drop in SEO visibility. Therefore choose your partners wisely: Focus on press release sites that are credible, trustworthy, providing a relevant platform to help you reach your target audience.



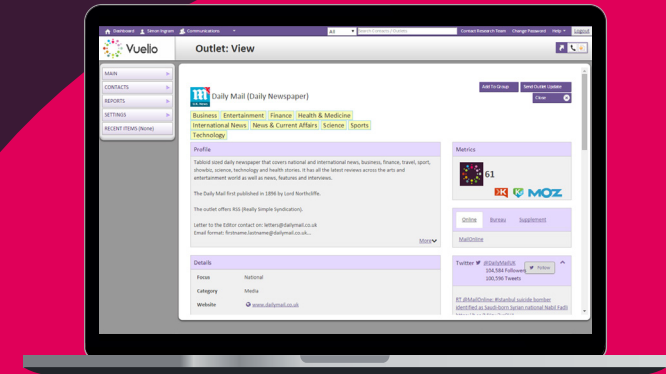
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