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Life After Press Release Distribution?

By Carolyn Moncel

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by: **Carolyn Moncel**

A few weeks ago I was participating on an on-line message board. One of the members was a new business owner who was very excited about sending out her company's first press release. The question she posted to the group was important, but also a common one echoed by so many small-business owners charged with handling media coverage in-house for the first time: "Now that I've distributed my press release, what do I do next?"

The answer to that question is a simple one: You follow up with the media. Following up with reporters by phone or e-mail --- where appropriate, can be more important than sending the release itself. Why? Because maybe the reporter didn't receive the fax sent, hasn't read his e-mail yet, or the headline for the release sent via wire services just didn't engage him enough to want to read the release in the first place. Or maybe the release wasn't sent to any one reporter in particular, which is always a no-no.

Fear is the number one reason why most people avoid making contact with the media. In fact, most small-business owners worry that they won't know what to say to the reporter once they call, or that they will catch the reporter at an inopportune time and anger him or her. However if you've taken the time to target the right reporter, study their news beat and the types of stories they prefer, and adhere to their deadlines, you should have nothing to fear in picking up the phone and calling a reporter.

There are basically two approaches one can take to follow up. First if you are confident in telling your company's story, you can just call up the appropriate reporter and tell him or her about your news and ask permission to send over the release. If there is interest from the reporter then send the release over immediately. The second way is to send the release to the correct reporter and then follow up with a phone call or e-mail --- base your follow up method on what the reporter prefers.

One word of caution: Always remember that reporters are very busy people so try to give them two days before following up. It takes them a while to get through all of the messages that they receive. However, if you have a breaking story to report and you want to alert the reporter in advance, or you

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have an event taking place — any particularly time-sensitive news, then give the reporter a call the next day after the release has been sent.

So you have the reporter on the phone – what exactly should you say to him or her? It's easiest to start with the one sentence you should never utter: "I'm following up to make sure you received my news release." Consider this the second commandment just right under "Thou shall not forget to ask a reporter if he or she is on deadline before pitching a story." It's also always a good idea to do a little preparation prior to making your phone call.

Here are some tips:

Do make sure that the press release sent is available in two forms – fax and e-mail. The reporter may not have received your release, and if he or she has an interest, they will want you to resend it. The faster you can resend it the better the chance of coverage, so have the fax version ready in the fax

machine and the e-mail version ready to go once you hit the "send" button.

Do prepare two alternative story ideas in case the reporter rejects the one offered in your release.

Do purposely leave out a couple nuggets of information so that you can offer them up to the reporter during follow up.

Do take time to listen to what the reporter says during your conversation. Your follow up call should not be a monologue but rather a dialogue. If you listen closely, the reporter will indicate interest and what your next directives should be. For example, you'll discover whether or not you need to conduct a second follow up.

Do make note as to whether your release has been forwarded to another reporter. If this turns out to be the case, then prepare to contact the new reporter with your story idea, but follow these steps again.

Do accept "No" gracefully. When a reporter says "no" to your story, accept the fact that he or she has a good reason — at least at that particular point in time. Therefore, you should never try to push a reporter into running your story because you will run the risk of alienating that reporter forever. He or she will remember you and each time you try to pitch a new story, you will be punished. Simply say "thanks," tweak your release and try again later. The timing or story angle may be wrong. Again, if you are listening closely, sometimes the reporter will tell you why the story will not be covered. Perhaps he or she wrote a story on a similar topic recently.

Last, it never hurts to prepare a little script to help you concentrate on the specific points you'd like to make to the reporter. Practice what you are going to say so that it feels natural during delivery. Below is an example of what you can say once you have the reporter on the line:

Hi, John. I'm Carolyn Moncel from MotionTemps, LLC. Are you currently on deadline and is this a good time to talk? Great! I know that you like covering stories about running offices more efficiently and my company specializes in helping other businesses get their offices organized.

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To kick off a new service that we're offering to our clients, we're sponsoring a contest called "Chicago's Most Disorganized Office," and the release that I sent to you has all of the details.

Oh, you didn't receive it? Shall I resend it and to which fax number? Oh, you'd like it by e-mail instead? Can I please verify your e-mail address? You can expect to receive the release in five minutes.

In case you're interested in covering the story, I thought I'd provide you with some additional numbers and sources, which might help to flush out your story. Would like me to fax that to you now also? Thanks for the consideration. Can I follow up with you again? If you have further questions, just give me a call at 877-815-0167 or e-mail me at

Now, what happens if you get the reporter's voice mail? Actually you can use the voice mail to your advantage because it allows you another opportunity to leave your contact information, pitch your idea and offer up alternative ideas without interruption. You can use the same script as above with a few modifications.

The bottom line here is this: the media will never know about your company unless you tell them. You can't wait for the reporter to call you because it will almost never happen. That type of response is

reserved for hard news stories and extremely rare circumstances — miraculous rescues, scandals, extraordinary acts of kindness — and most business stories just don't fall into any of those categories. As the business owner the onus is on you to tell your company's story to the reporter, and you do it by following up.

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Press Release: Marketing Good News

By Scott Lindsay

Once upon a time a press release was sent to the nearest newspaper in the hopes that at least some of the release might make it to newsprint. Today a press release to a local newspaper may be included only as an afterthought.

In marketing your website the use of a press release can be an effective means of drawing people to your website.

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Certainly there are skills involved in writing a press release and there are plenty of qualified freelance writers who can assist you in the development of a solid press release. However, as with any new process it is possible to learn the skill of press release writing.

In today's online community the press release is about more than trying to pass muster with the news media. Today press releases are routinely found on individual websites and can be picked up by affiliated websites. In essence when a press release is written it needs to appeal to the news media, but it also needs to connect with the public.

Many online businesses will place a 'press release' section on their website as a means of keeping visitors informed of new developments within the company or the website.

A press release can be developed for a significant number of events. For instance, if you provide a new website design you could send out a press release talking about the new design and the reasons this design is more functional and useful to your customers. If you launch a new service, a press release can be an easy way to encourage the curious to come take a look. If you have added a new line to your existing offerings, a press release can alert your customers and potential clients to the good news. If you've won an industry award a press release can work to instill a greater degree of trust in your firm.

There are several online companies that handle the distribution of press release information. Perhaps one of the most well known is PR Newswire, but there are other services available. Many of these services require a fee for distribution.

Many online netpreneurs have learned that the effective distribution of strategic press releases can provide a sizeable return on investment in the form of new clients and unique visitors.

When you have good news you shouldn't hesitate to share it in the form of a press release. This is just one more online marketing tool worth exploring.

Scott Lindsay is a web developer and entrepreneur. He is the founder of HighPowerSites and many other web projects. HighPowerSites is the easiest do-it-yourself website builder on the web. Get your own website online in just 5 minutes with

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