

Reaching Your Readers

*Making Releases Relevant in the Digital
Era*

PR and Media Relations Summit 2017



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The State of the News Release

Gaining media coverage is no longer the only purpose of the news release.

- It is an official statement and can become a legal document, posted on the corporate website and on internal channels.
- It is directed to employees, and has more impact than issuing an internal communication that says, "Here's what senior executives have to say about this issue."
- It helps investors, particularly the common person who doesn't have an in-depth understanding of corporate finance. Such an investor relies on news releases for simplified information.
- Partners feel important when they are mentioned in a release, particularly when it is part of a joint effort.
- It helps build consensus among executives.

Know how Journalists Judge News Value

Journalists are drawn to stories that do the following:

- Inform readers of new developments
- Develop understanding
- Stir conversation
- Explain trends
- Answer questions
- Simplify complexities

Crafting Effective Headlines

Be direct and clear

Why Netflix will bump up prices

Uber, Google Self-driving tech suit revs up

Draw them in

How this millennial saved \$1 by age 30

How do planes just vanish?

Make it useful

Tax tips for the self-employed

4 things to know about Apple's new products

Twitter Headlines

- **Focus the tweet on stirring curiosity** beyond what they get from the title.

See how five of the world's glaciers have melted through the years, in GIFs

Threat to Beluga whales and humpback whales isn't clear after oil leaks into Alaska waters

- **Include only two or three clickable elements.**
- **If you have a video, upload it directly to Twitter.**
- **Use attention-getting words at the front.**

AP – Breaking: Divided Senate panel backs Supreme Court nominee Neil Gorsuch

- **Links must deliver what you promise.** It's a narrow line between inducing readers to click and lying to them.

Crafting Strong Leads

original

As part of its long-standing commitment to equality in the workplace and the communities it serves, Company X today announced a \$250,000 contribution to the San Francisco-based National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR). This contribution comes on the heels of the Supreme court's landmark marriage equality decision, and will provide thousands of LGBT individuals with continued resources and counsel.

revised

Thousands of LGBT people will receive continued resources and counsel with the help of a \$250,000 contribution from Company X.

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original

If local building officials notified you that your home is substantially damaged, you may be able to receive funds to make your structure safer and stronger.

Tips for strong leads

- Strive for one sentence of roughly 30 words or fewer. If you need two sentences, don't exceed three lines of text because _____
- A lead should contain only two things: the core news (in the main clause) followed by the context (why the news is significant). Important details that elaborate on the lead belong in the second and third paragraphs.
- When writing about technical information (defense, financial services, technology), consider asking, what will this product enable someone to do tomorrow that they can't do today? How will this make life easier?

Write with Specific Details

Don't use buzzwords

Buzzwords kill the freshness of your writing, because they are old and stale.

Customer-centric, mindshare, leverage, bandwidth, robust solutions, upskill

Weave in examples and explanation

Overall, U.S. retail sales climbed 0.7 percent in November, the biggest jump in eight months. Americans stepped up shopping, *spending more for cars, gardening supplies, electronics, and clothing while also dining out more.*

Use comparisons

Consumer spending is *a major source of fuel* for the economy.

The editor considered himself *a linguistic gardener*, cultivating a weedy patch of text in the hope of restoring order and coaxing something beautiful out of it.

Tata Motors' new Nano is a tiny car, *like a jellybean with wheels.*

Panera Bread shops will no longer offer cinnamon buns the size of a Frisbee.

Punch Up Your Writing

Tips for clear, crisp writing

- **Unified paragraphs** – Talk about one main point. Most paragraphs should be two to four sentences and three to five lines of text.
- **Sentence length** – Generally, 12-25 words. Some sentences will be shorter, some longer. Read the sentence aloud and listen to your voice. You will know if it's too long, if you stumble, or if it sounds awkward.
- **Build variety into your writing** - Use sentences of different lengths and varied structures.
- **Punctuate effectively** – Punctuation is intended to help readers understand your meaning.
- **Select strong verbs** – These are the spark plugs that energize your writing.
Competitive pressures **squashed** profits
The audience **thundered** its approval.
The wind **rattled** the courtroom windows
The board **rejected** a request from shareholders

Here is an example of conversational, fluent writing

Gross is good when it comes to food for kids these days.

Chip and burger brands, ignoring mom's admonition not to play with food, are cooking up brightly colored fare high in the "ick" factor that appeals to kids. In some cases, foods change colors; in others, they turn kids' mouths yucky hues.

Frito-Lay on Sunday rolled out Cheetos laced with color-activating ingredients.(12) And Burger King is two weeks into its month-long ``choose the ooze'' promotion offering colorful condiments for kids' meals.(20) The company says it is its hottest promotion in years.(10)

Writing with Clarity ***Corporate Workshops and Individual Coaching***

Ken O'Quinn is a professional writing coach and the author of *Perfect Phrases for Business Letters* (McGraw-Hill) whose workshops have helped thousands of Fortune 500 communicators and PR professionals to write more effectively. He started *Writing with Clarity*, following a journalism career with the Associated Press.

He conducts on-site workshops and provides one-on-one coaching in news writing, feature writing, social media writing, and interviewing. Clients include GE, Dell, Chevron, the Gap, Yelp, Northrop Grumman, State Farm Insurance, UPS, John Deere, Campbell's Soup, Best Buy, Oracle, Raytheon, Reebok, and Georgia-Pacific.

Public Relations clients include Fleishman Hillard, Burson-Marsteller, Edelman, Weber Shandwick, and Text100.

Ken has presented at the PRSA and IABC international conferences, as well as at the Raytheon Women's Leadership Conference. His writing has appeared in such publications as the *New York Times*, *Fast Company magazine*, the *Harvard Management Communication Letter*, the *Journal of Employee Communication Management*, and PRSA's *Strategist* magazine.

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