

APPROVED

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**PUBLIC RELATIONS
GUIDE**

A brief guide to PR

Pro-active public relations is about being seen by your potential customers in a positive light. The good news is that the renewable energy sector is topical and of interest in many respects as the technology spreads through communities.

The most obvious method for achieving positive publicity is through a news (or 'press') release, which is a great way to raise the profile of your business. Because it's carried in the media, it is perceived as trustworthy and independently verified information (through the filter of a journalist). Done properly it can have a greater impact than an advert – or, even better, add weight to a co-existing advertising campaign – and establishes you as experts in the eyes of readers, viewers and listeners. In addition, many news stories are now also published online, boosting your visibility through search engines.

There are many areas in the life of any business that can justify putting together a news release, if you know where to look. These could include:

- winning new business;
- hiring new staff or taking on an apprentice;
- achieving milestones (first/fifth/tenth anniversary, reaching £1m turnover, etc.);
- expert comment on an industry-specific issue as it affects your local audience;
- adding depth to coverage of topical news;
- re-branding;
- expanding;
- re-locating;
- launching innovative products;
- and so on...

Where to be seen?

Remember that any mention in your local press is getting you right in front of your potential customer base. Newspapers are still the most effective medium and should be your main target. There are also an increasing number of online-only neighbourhood or region-specific websites and blogs (sometimes called 'hyper-local' sites) which are worth sending your news to. These generally have a lower threshold for judging what they consider to be news and are often happy to publish most well-written and relevant releases that come their way because they don't have the news-gathering resources of the traditional media. Individually their audiences might not be large, but they have the added advantage of helping you to be found online by searching customers. However, it is often worth waiting to send them your release until the traditional media (newspapers, local radio) has had time to use it. If they see it published by an online competitor before they can print it, they might think twice!

Think pictures

A bright, in-focus photograph can work wonders for getting your release used, catching the eye of readers and instantly communicating your message. Ideally it will have a smiling person or people in it and will illustrate the story by featuring the product or place that is the subject of the release. Make sure any photograph is of good quality (decent file size, above 500Kb). Make sure the people fill the frame because the background is (usually) irrelevant and may contain details you don't want people to see! Wherever possible a news release should be accompanied by a photograph.

Top ten tips

When you've found your news, there is a formula you can follow to present it to the media, of whatever kind. Here are the top ten tips for putting together a winning release:

1. A press release should be succinct, to the point and tell the journalist within the first two paragraphs what the central point of your release is. Put the best bits first, and anything else further down in priority order, assume the journalist knows nothing about your business. Keep the first ('intro') paragraph down to less than 25 words.
2. Make sure all the information is contained within the release – a busy journalist doesn't have spare time to Google where you're based or what you do. Use the basic journalistic approach of identifying who, why, when, where and how. If your release answers all those questions, you're in business.
3. Keep a news release to around 350 words – if a journalist is interested, they'll contact you for more information. But always include a quote from yourself or someone in the company, with a full name and title, not just initials.
4. Don't just send it as an attachment, it could be deleted without being opened. Make sure the release is within the body of the email.
5. Make sure that it is relevant to the target audience for the media you're sending it to. If you're a concrete pipe manufacturer, it's unlikely Good Housekeeping will be interested.
6. Don't worry about a catchy headline, journalists write their own. But do make sure you say what the release contains which is of interest. For example, "Your company name announces new initiative" is too obvious. Use a short headline to focus on the initiative or announcement.
7. Use plain language – using terms like 'leading', 'top', 'respected' in reference to your company is almost always likely to be cut. Keep technical terms to a minimum unless sending to a trade journalist or include them separately as notes at the bottom of the release.
8. Make sure the release has full contact details at the end, giving a name, number and email address. You can also include any brief notes which you think might be important as background, but keep it to the bare minimum.
9. Once you've written your release, save it and come back to it ten minutes later. Is the real story actually buried in the last few sentences? You'd be surprised how often that happens!
10. Most importantly, find out the best person to send it to. It's no good preparing a carefully crafted news release and sending it off to be lost in the ether. Find a name, call the journalist, ask them if they're the right person to receive it (business editor, features editor, farming reporter, etc.). But a word of warning, if you've got a long winded enquiry or want to talk through a story, ask if they have time to talk or find out when is the best time to call back. You'll get short shrift if they are on one of their many deadlines.

Don't forget...

When you have gone to the trouble of getting media coverage you need to maximise the benefits. Sharing links to any online coverage of your story through social media gives you great, positive content to work with and ensures a wider audience. If you haven't already got social media set up and running, take a look at our guide on the subject for easy ways to get started!



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