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GETTING YOUR STORY TOLD

Boost the News Value of Your Press Releases

After you hit the send button, does it seem as though your press releases become lost in the abyss? It's not unusual to feel like these communications get lost in a vacuum. Sometimes, reporters and editors are just too busy to open every email, but what's more likely is your press release was lacking timeliness, specificity or an appealing hook.

"Too often communications professionals aren't thinking about the real news value," says Jack Appleman, writing instructor and coach at Successful Business Writing (Monroe, NY). "They focus too much on what their organization believes is important rather than what an editor might consider to be newsworthy."

So put yourself in the recipient's shoes and ask, "Why should I care?" Here Appleman offers tips for nonprofit communications professionals who want to generate more buzz with their press releases:

1. **Know what's newsworthy.** "As you write your press release, visualize what the potential story would look like in a publication your organization hopes to be featured in," Appleman says. "Ask yourself, 'Is this really newsworthy, or is this just satisfying my internal team?' Figure out an angle that reporters will find compelling."
2. **Craft an informative and intriguing headline.** "Building news value starts with the headline, which should lure readers — especially reporters — and encourage them to say, 'Tell me more,'" Appleman offers. "For example, instead of 'XY's donations have risen by 30 percent,' say, 'XY's donations up 30 percent, thanks to generous college students.' Now the reporter wants to know why this segment is becoming more philanthropic — that's a story."
3. **Include important links.** "Nowadays journalists prefer a shorter press release," Appleman says. "Instead of including all the background information, insert quick links to videos, bios, press assets and quotes from leadership. And make it easy for them to contact you — include a link to your email and phone."
4. **Know the journalist's work.** "Get to know the writers you're targeting," Appleman suggests. "Read their columns and determine what they consider to be newsworthy." Appleman adds the subheadline is a great place to tailor the press release to the journalist's specific interests.
5. **Make the subject line pop.** "You want to be able to give the news quickly. When you email a press release, provide as much information as possible in a concise subject line," Appleman shares. "If I write '65 percent of leaders don't engage remote workers, hurts profits,' then I've intrigued reporters with a timely reason to open my email and learn why the failure to engage employees hurts the bottom line."

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