



Exposing the Truth About How to Write Great Press Releases

You've done something you feel deserves attention, mainly from the local press, TV and radio stations and the general public as well. You want to get your message out there, but you don't know how to put the words together, and more importantly, get it in the right peoples' hands.

Throughout my 30 years as a journalist, I've read literally thousands and thousands of press releases, most of which end up in the recycling bin—but why?

One of the main problems is that shops think everything they do is newsworthy, but unfortunately, editors and writers don't agree. Press releases announcing your great cycle times, quality work, or how you landed another DRP aren't going to make the front pages, or even the back cover, for that matter.

Collision repair shops often have business announcements, initiatives or events that are worth promoting. Things

like new shop openings, community service efforts or educational programs can catch the attention of your community. One of the best ways of getting the word out is the development and distribution of press releases that are readable, relevant and easy to edit, as well as accompanied by quality, high-resolution color photos.

Kristen Simpson is the president at *Simpson Communications*, an 11-year-old public relations firm that represents automotive companies such as Chief Automotive Technologies, Ford Motor Company, the Automotive Lift Institute (ALI) and Elektron. As a former journalist, Simpson provides some helpful tips about how to produce press releases that will get significant results.

"Some companies think that they need to produce press releases at predetermined intervals, such as monthly, quarterly, etc. whether they have something to say or not," Simpson said.

"That drives media insane, because they don't want to get a press release that has only been sent for the sake of sending a press release. They want actual news. The biggest part is finding something that is indeed newsworthy."

Simpson suggests using a professional, well-established public relations firm to get your release out to the world.

"There's a reason why public relations companies exist, because they know how to write effective press releases and they have relationships with media. And today it's even more important because Search Engine Optimization (SEO) has become such a large part of the process. Finding the best keywords and using them in the headline is so important now. Back in the old days when we were writing for the trade magazines, we could write witty headlines without any concerns for SEO, but now it's important, because much of what we write appears online."

Put the vital stuff upfront and make your releases easy to edit, and you'll get more love from the media, Simpson explained.

"I still believe that the inverted pyramid style is the best way to go with any press release. You put your most important information at the beginning, because for space considerations, editors know that they can cut it from the bottom. That way, if they only run one paragraph from your release, you know that you've gotten your most important information across."

Every press release should also be accompanied by one or more photos. "Quality, high resolution photos are key because a picture is worth a thousand words. In many cases, they might not run your article, but they will opt for running your photo, with a caption. Increasingly, people read less and that's why photos are more im-

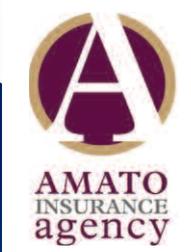
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portant now than ever,” added Simpson.

Following up with a phone call or an email to an editor or reporter after sending your press release is a good idea, but only in the right situation.

“Editors don’t like it when you call them to ask them did you receive my press release, because they receive so many every day. You should call only when you have something worthwhile to share or pitch, because otherwise you’re essentially wasting their time. Building relationships with the media is vital, but you should only reach out when you have something you definitely believe they will be interested in,” Simpson explained.

Eli Greenbaum works for Worden & Company in Royal Oak, MI and has been writing press releases for PPG since 2008.

“People don’t read as much anymore, so get all of your important information in that first paragraph,” Greenbaum said. “Any press release should be written like a news story and it needs to report news—new

products, new services, new personnel, new management—but it has to be news. Otherwise, there isn’t any point. A good press release acts like free advertising, but remember—a press release is not an advertisement. So, if you toot your own horn too much, it will normally backfire on you.”

It doesn’t always have to be earth shattering news to get ink from the right forms of media, Greenbaum explained. “If a body shop switches to PPG products, for instance, yes—that is news. If you hire a new manager or acquire a new shop, those are the types of things that publications are looking for. But, if you write a release about how good you are at fixing cars, it’s likely that it won’t get any attention from any editors, because they see that type of thing every day and will undoubtedly avoid running it at all costs.”

Also, in certain parts of the country, you may need to create several press releases written in different languages.

Greenbaum said, “Don’t try to do a straight translation, because there are nuances with each language obviously. So get someone to do the trans-

lation if at all possible. Many years ago, Chevrolet introduced the Nova to the Spanish market without checking out the translation and they ended up with egg on their faces, because in Spanish, ‘Nova’ means ‘Don’t Go!’”

One of the great things about press releases is once you’ve created one, you can utilize it in many other ways—in brochures, flyers, newsletters, blogs, web site content and in your e-mail marketing efforts, just to name a few. We love recycling and re-using things in this industry, so press releases should be a perfect match for that.

So, you’ve written a great press release and taken some excellent full-color high-res photos to go with it. But, now you have to figure out whom to send it to. The first step is to identify all of the media organizations that operate in your market—daily and weekly newspapers, radio stations, TV stations, regional magazines and business publications, as well as national trade publications for the industry.

Then, you will need to locate the appropriate person within each organization to send the release to. Focus on local consumer, business and automo-

tive publications first, because those will likely get you the best results. Emailing the releases is preferable to snail mailing them, because they’re easier for editors and reporters to use them and if they’ve cut and pasted it into their magazine or newspaper, that’s obviously ideal. Once you’ve assembled your media list, start building relationships with everyone on it, because sometimes just knowing a media contact by name and making small talk with them from time to time can lead to free ink and/or exposure for your shop.

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