



BSSEC

resources

Promoting Your Enterprise - a resource pack

Part 3 - Writing press releases

This section gives guidance on how to write effective, clear and appealing press releases - one of the most practical ways to gain publicity. Generating publicity is an excellent way to promote your enterprise as it can be cost and time effective, and often reach a wider market than your budget would otherwise permit. Another key benefit of publicity is that it can increase the credibility of a product or service because media coverage is effectively an unpaid endorsement.

Getting started

The purpose of any press release is to inform its media recipients about an event, news item or announcement, and to convince the recipients that the information is worthy to be published or broadcast. Before producing a press release you should also be clear and realistic about what you want to achieve as this may affect your approach.

Standard format

Press releases usually follow a standard format to ensure that they can be read quickly and easily. This is important because journalists receive many press releases on a daily basis. The format usually consists of:

- Logo - to help the recipient immediately identify the sender (it's worth remembering that this only applies to hard copy press releases - as a general principle it's best not to put graphic files in an email press release).
- Press release date - if the information contained is for immediate publication, then it should be marked with the current date and the statement 'for immediate use'. If however the information is time sensitive, then mark it with 'embargoed until' followed by the earliest date the information can be published or broadcast.
- Title - it's more important that the title indicates the nature of the release's content than it is for it to be something snappy. Unless you're very confident in your writing skills, leave creativity to the experts, but if you do opt for a catchy title, then support it with an explanatory sub-title.
- Story - this is the main section of a press release, which should contain all the main information you wish to convey.

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Promoting Your Enterprise - a resource pack has been produced by Birmingham & Solihull Social Economy Consortium (BSSEC) - a practitioner-led network that supports and promotes the social enterprise sector.

The pack provides guidance and information for social enterprises to help them improve the effectiveness of their promotional activities. It comprises:

Part 1 - Getting Started

Part 2 - Defining Your Market

Part 3 - Writing press releases

Part 4 - Creating leaflets and brochures

Part 5 - Producing a newsletter

Part 6 - Building a basic website

The pack can be downloaded, free of charge, at www.bssec.org.uk

BSSEC contacts

General enquiries

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BSSEC Secretariat
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See the test version of our Purchasing Guide to Social Enterprise & the Voluntary Sector in Birmingham & Solihull at www.bssec.org.uk

■ Notes to editor - the notes section follows the main story, and includes further, more specific details where necessary. For example, the notes could contain detailed statistics or a brief history of your organisation.

■ Contact information - details of the press contact, and of any key organisations or people mentioned in the release if relevant.

Writing approach

When writing the main story of your press release, it's essential to ensure that it contains the following information:

■ **What** - what's the main message of the press release, what's it about? This seems obvious, but journalists need to make quick decisions about whether or not a press release is suitable for coverage and they can only do this if the topic of a press release is communicated clearly.

■ **When** - is the release referring to something that's already occurred or announcing a future event.

■ **Where** - if the press release is about an event, where is it being held? If it's an announcement or news story, does it impact on the world, the UK, a region or a town? If it mentions an enterprise or organisation, where are they based?

■ **Who** - who's involved and who is the news of interest to?

■ **Why** - explain the relevance of a piece of news. For example, if a new report is being published - why? Or if a new service is being launched - why?

As these are the most important pieces of information, it's common practice for all these to be briefly mentioned in the first or second paragraph of a press release to ensure that they're communicated quickly. For example: 'Plush Training (who), a Birmingham-based (where) social enterprise, launched a new IT course (what) this month (when) to help disadvantaged teenagers learn new skills (why)'.

The easiest way to write a press release is in two stages. First of all just concentrate on making sure all the relevant facts are covered. Once you've done this you can then re-write the text to increase its appeal. A simple way to do this is by adding quotes from those involved in or affected by the topic of the release.

Press releases should be concise and as a general rule of thumb, no longer than two sides of A4.

Creating an angle

Don't waste time attempting to write the press release exactly as you think the story should be published - this is the journalist's job and it's much easier for them to do this if presented with clear information rather than creative text. Also, the majority of publications and programmes have established editorial styles and will invariably re-write whatever you send them.

However, giving your press release an 'angle' will make it more appealing. Look at whether it's possible to relate its content to current events or popular culture, for example: "Plush Training is holding a Dragon's Den event at which six would-be entrepreneurs - graduates from its most recent social enterprise course - will have an opportunity to pitch their business ideas to a panel of successful local business people."

Also, use suitable language throughout your press release to create the right tone. For example, if a release is about an exciting and positive event, use exciting and positive words, eg: "Plush Training is pleased to be sponsoring the action-packed event, which promises to offer a range of wild and wonderful activities for people of all ages".

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Press packs

If it's not possible for you to communicate all of the information you wish to in a concise press release, then you may wish to create a press pack - which is essentially a press release and related items that support its contents, such as:

- Research extracts
- Clippings of other articles related to the subject of your press release
- Leaflets/brochures
- CD ROM, film footage, etc.
- Case studies

Using photographs

Good photos that support a press release can often help give your story visual interest and therefore help ensure wider coverage.

If you have relevant photographs, you can initially send them out with a press release on a CD, however this can be expensive and time consuming. Alternatively, you can send photos as email attachments with your press release but to avoid clogging up inboxes, it's best to send just one or two.

A more common approach is to simply state in a press release - either at the end or in the 'notes to editor' section - that photos are available on request. Ensure that you follow this with details on how the photos can be obtained.

Also, if you supply photographs always ensure that you give captions - they may not necessarily be used but it's usually helpful to at least indicate what the photos depict.

Photo formats

The size and colour requirements of a photo to be used in a print publication, are different to those of a photo intended for digital use. In light of this, it's best to supply photos as unaltered files from your digital camera or original prints - this enables a contact to enhance the images according to their needs.

If possible, supply digital photos (either on CD or by email) rather than photo prints as images tend to lose quality when they're scanned. Never send PC print-outs of images as they're unsuitable for reproduction. Also, never supply digital images within other documents, such as Word, PDF or Power Point files.

Photo opportunities

If your press release is about a future event, then there may be scope to arrange photo opportunities to encourage media contacts and photographers to attend.

To highlight this in a press release, add a section entitled 'Photo opportunities' at the end of the release or in the 'Notes to editor' section detailing what photo opportunities there will be - for example a presentation, a keynote speech by a prominent speaker or a prestigious visitor - and detail the date, time and place. Alternatively you can note that photo opportunities can be arranged at the convenience of the media contact if they get in touch to discuss their requirements.

Distribution

Who you send press releases to is largely dependent on what you do, how you do it, who you do it for, why you do it, and where you do it. For example, as a social enterprise in Birmingham or Solihull you could send press releases to all Birmingham and/or Solihull media. You could also send them to specialist media that cover your sector.

Create a media list

You're much more likely to obtain media coverage if you maintain a well-organised and up-to-date media contact list detailing all the media sources that have particular reference to your locality or trade sector. Don't forget other organisations' newsletters, online publications and free papers.

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It may be useful to create sub-groups for your media list - e.g. national media, local media, trade media - so that you can easily select which groups you send each release to.

The contact details of the news desks or editors of many publications can be easily obtained from the Internet and local directories, but where possible it's best to get a named contact at each organisation which you can then use to follow up any releases you send out.

A significant proportion of press releases are now sent by email, and although this isn't a hard rule, it has many advantages - it's cheaper, quicker, more environmentally-friendly and it's more convenient for journalists as it enables them to 'cut and paste' information.

Also, it enables you to keep a record of all your media contacts and the dates on which you contacted them.

Timing it right

Another key factor of distribution is timing. Magazines for example are produced well in advance of their actual publication date - a January publication may be researched during the preceding November, written in the first two

weeks of December, and printed just before Christmas.

To help you decide the best time to send out press releases, and how far in advance you need to send them, request production schedules from the contacts on your media contact list.

Following up

Remember that securing press coverage is extremely competitive, with hundreds of other enterprises, organisations and individuals competing for the same 'column inches'.

Following up your press release with an email or phone call to key media contacts can help enormously however. Even if they don't plan to use your release, this follow up contact can prove to be extremely useful for gaining feedback on what kind of press release they are likely to give coverage to in the future.

And do make sure that the staff member named as the contact on the press release is available for comment and knows that the press release has been sent out! They may also want to prepare themselves for enquiries.

Issues to consider

Using professional agencies

If you only plan on sending out one or two press releases each year, then your enterprise will probably choose to do this in-house. But if you plan to send out releases on a very regular basis then it may be worth considering a professional PR agency to write and distribute press releases on your behalf. Fees vary between agencies, however it's fairly common to pay between £120 - £200, plus VAT, per press release.

The main advantage of using an agency is that you'll receive a professional, comprehensive service that will save you a lot of time. Using an agency does not guarantee desired coverage of course - although some agencies may claim that it does - and in some cases an agency may not understand the social aims of your business or the key messages you want to get over. Be prepared to work very closely with a PR agency to ensure that they are properly briefed regarding your business.

Liability

Any description of products or services must be accurate - it is an enterprise's responsibility to ensure that this is the case in all promotional material regardless of whether it's produced in-house or externally. Also, if any text, slogans or images that do not belong to your enterprise are used, then reproduction permission must be sought.

Refer to: www.tradingstandards.gov.uk

Useful resources

You Send It

People in the media sector often work to very tight deadlines and so may occasionally make urgent requests for further information, images, etc. If you need to send large photos or files urgently and there isn't time to post them on a CD ROM, you can send files up to 100MB in size for free at www.yousendit.com

Plush Training

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Social entrepreneurs brave the den

Plush Training is holding a Dragon's Den event at which six would-be entrepreneurs - graduates from its most recent social enterprise course - will have an opportunity to pitch their business ideas to a panel of successful local business people.

The event has been organised by the training enterprise to highlight the benefits of social enterprise and encourage support from businesses in the private sector. It will take place on 4 June 2007 at Plush Training's Learning Centre in Birmingham.

Sam Charles, who owns Charles Logistics, the largest employer in Birmingham, will head up the panel. "I don't think any money will actually change hands," says Mr Charles, "but I hope that lots of great advice and good ideas will. Anything that helps young people build new local businesses that can help the community is a good thing in my book."

Anthony Bearpark, Learning Co-ordinator at Plush Training, says: "The event is intended to be fun but it does have a serious purpose. Our students will get a chance to test their business ideas with some of Birmingham's most successful business leaders, and that's a great learning opportunity. But I'm hoping our 'dragons' will also find out more about what motivates social entrepreneurs who want to run their businesses for a social purpose."

The event will also be broadcast live via Plush Training's website at www.plustraining.co.uk.

- ENDS -

For more information contact Jane Elliott at Plush Training on 0121 123 4567, or email jane.elliott@plustraining.co.uk

Notes to editor

- **Photo opportunities - a photo call at the event will be held between 2pm - 2.30pm on 4 June 2007. For further details please contact Jane Elliott at Plush Training.**
- **Plush Training was established as a social enterprise in 1999 to provide training opportunities to people that are disadvantaged in the labour market.**