

The Evolution of the Press Release

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Editor's note: The press release is the least loved document in the media universe. We get way too many here at TechCrunch, and some bloggers equate them to [spam](#). But

they do have their uses. In this guest post, **Brian Solis** explains how the press release has evolved, and sheds some light on why it may be so difficult to kill off. Solis writes this from the perspective of a PR professional. He is Principal of FutureWorks, a PR and New Media agency in Silicon Valley and also blogs at [PR 2.0](#).

Press releases come in different flavors and serve different purposes. Well-written press releases are far from dead. In fact, when developed strategically, their opportunities, appeal and benefits are only expanding in conjunction with the groups of various influencers and consumers who rely on them for relevant information.

The disruption of the Web has splintered press releases into a variety of formats to serve different audiences and different purposes: Traditional releases for media, SEO (search engine optimized) releases for customers, and [Social Media Releases](#) for press, bloggers, and also customers.

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Customer-Focused News Releases

Companies and marketers can use distribution services to complement releases written for journalists and bloggers to reach customers directly through traditional search engines as well as news aggregation services such as [Techmeme](#).

And, according to a recent Outsell study, over 51% of IT professionals reported that they get their news from press releases in **Yahoo and Google news** over trade journals.

And it's not just tech. When implemented with calls and links to action, and if they read in a way that's compelling to people aka customers, you'll find that they're usually compelled to act.

The trick for this new breed of press releases is to write it as the article you want to read. Keep it clean, clear, pseudo impartial, but definitely focused on benefits for specific customers. Basically, humanize the story.

Here's a rundown of the different formats of press releases:

Traditional Releases

Standard press releases are what many reporters and bloggers use to build their stories. Let's help them help us in the process.

When expanding your news or story into a press release, it's also important to recognize that a majority of the wording templates that we all use still suck. But, there's room in our activity for a well-written release that conveys value, benefits and a story that's relevant to each recipient. It's easier said than done however. Most press releases are driven by product development, which begets an inward and narrowly focused view from life inside the company. The final release usually winds up riddled with adjectives, tech jargon, and hype with very little value stringing everything together.

The best releases are going to be outward-focused and reflective of the state of the market, how you fit in it, and what's in it for the potential stakeholders (customers).

Oh, and please, can the "canned" quotes. We all know you're excited and thrilled at whatever it is you're announcing. But, if the quote isn't genuinely from the person saying it and bears little or no value to the implications of the news, then it only takes away from it. It's OK to leave it out.

I guess the best advice is to make the release read like the article that you would ultimately like to see, worrying less about structure and format and more about news, the story, and the supporting facts (and media elements) that help writers build the story more effectively. And, try to keep the release between 400 – 500 words or lower.

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SEO Press Releases

Releasing press releases on wire services such as PRNewsire, BusinessWire, and MarketWire offer additional value in the form of SEM (search engine marketing). Integrating key words, phrases and embedded links optimize their "findability" and rank within traditional search engines such as Google or Yahoo. In this case, the greatest targets for SEO releases are actually customers, not journalists.

As noted previously, customers use search engines to find solutions and often, press releases provide them with the information they need to make decisions.

Many say that if you're not on the first two pages of search results, then your company is losing the battle for online mindshare. SEO releases contribute to the authority of related search results, but keep in mind that other factors contribute as well, such as keyword buys, keywords on your Web site, affiliate strategies, as well as other tools and campaigns.

When drafting the release, ensure that your top keywords are included towards the front of the release, especially in the headline and subhead, as well as the boilerplate. Choose up to three words and repeat through the release – especially in the boilerplate. Search engines seem to pay more attention to the natural bolded words as well as the repeated words toward the top of press releases (first half).

It's also extremely helpful to use those keywords as anchor text to link back to strategic landing pages on your Website, ensure that those pages are also keyword optimized as well. It's important not to overuse each word or over link.

Keyword density, the number of times a keyword or phrase appears compared to the total number of words in a page, is optimized between 2-8% according to experts. I've erred in the middle of that ratio.

Also be sure to include industry and product names and categories in place of generic descriptors such as, "the product," "the solution," and "the company," throughout the release, without ruining the flow. We want to match our keywords to correlate with the real world patterns of how people search.

Also, be sure to link rich media so that your key words show up in content-specific search engines as well.

If you need help determining the best keywords for your business, here are some resources:

- [SEO Tools](#) (my favorite)
- [WordTracker](#)
- [Google AdWords](#)
- [Google Trends](#)
- [BlogPulse Trends](#)

The ideal length of these press releases is usually sub 400 words.

Media Web Address: <http://www.reddit.com/tb/6j0s8>

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