



**OPTICIANS ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA
2009 STATE LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE**

THE MECHANICS OF WRITING –

**BE SUCCESSFUL IN WRITING AND CREATING
SYNERGY FOR YOUR STATE ORGANIZATION**

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PROFESSIONAL PRESS RELEASES

What is a press release?

A press release is the most basic and effective form of communication between your organization and the media. By definition a press release is simply a statement prepared for distribution to the media. The purpose of a press release is to give journalists information that is useful, accurate and interesting. It is a written document that efficiently conveys the Who, What, Where, When, and Why (meaning why anyone should care) about your event or news item.

The Newsroom

Before you can write an effective press release, you need to have a basic understanding of how newspapers work.

The newsroom is a busy place. However, amidst this hectic environment, the simple fact is that **NEWSPAPERS WANT NEWS**. Newspapers want timely, interesting news that matters to the community they serve.

In the newsroom, you have two basic contacts: reporters who write the articles that go into the paper, and editors who edit the articles themselves, decide which articles go into the paper, and actually put the paper together. Reporters work under the direction of editors, who work in particular departments.

Where To Send Your Release

You could spend days crafting the perfect press release, send it to the wrong person, and watch all your hard work go down the drain. Therefore, you need to know exactly who to send your press release to.

Releases should be sent to editors of the specific department that your news item or event pertains to. The editor can then pass it on to the reporter that covers the subject you're writing about if they want to turn it into a story. If you don't know who covers what department at Paper X, look inside the actual paper. Usually that information is listed on one of the inside pages. If not, call the paper and find out.

Also, make sure you include the name of the editor you are addressing, and spell it correctly. Once you get the correct contacts, update them regularly.

Do not send the press release to multiple contacts at the newspaper. One good release sent to the correct editor will accomplish much more than seven bad releases sent to seven reporters and editors.

How To Send Your Release

There are basically three ways to send your press release: E-mail, snail mail, and fax.

E-mail is ideal because it is fast, inexpensive, allows you to send to many media outlets at one time, and allows editors and reporters to take information directly from the release and put it into a new document.

You can also link directly to your Web site in the e-mail, which is a major plus. That way, if an editor or reporter wants more information about the organization, it's one click away.

Tips for Sending Press Releases By E-Mail

Get the e-mail address for the correct editor, and send it there. You can also cc it to a general news address as a backup if you want to be extra safe. Most newspapers have a general address for news - just check inside the paper or call and find out what it is.

Your subject line should be the same as or similar to your headline.

When sending releases by e-mail, do not send them as attachments. Make it easy: give them the information right in the body of the e-mail. Also, avoid bright colors and graphics at all costs. Timely, newsworthy information clearly presented is all you need.

What Will Happen To My Press Release?

When you send a press release, there are basically four possible things that could happen to it.

- 1) It could get thrown away or deleted.
- 2) Another possibility is that your event or news item will run as a community or calendar listing. It offers minimal exposure, but it's better than nothing.
- 3) The most common possibility is that your release will be turned into a "brief." Briefs are basically a cross between a listing and an article. Briefs run in the paper on a space-available basis.
- 4) The release turns into an article. This obviously offers a much more in-depth look at what you are communicating about. It is featured much more prominently than a brief, and generates much more attention.

What Makes for a Good Press Release?

- ✓ A press release is only as good as the information it contains.
- ✓ Your information should be timely. That means it should relate to something that is coming up, or has recently happened.
- ✓ You should not assume that what you're writing about is important – you should convey the importance in your release.
- ✓ Whenever possible, include good pictures. Even if all you get out of the release is a brief or listing, the picture may run along with it, giving you some extra exposure.

Other Tips Before You Write

Understand the nature of your media outlets. That means, understand what kind of paper you are sending your release to. Is it a local paper that serves 20,000 readers? Is it a large city paper with 500,000 readers? Is it more news-oriented, or does it focus on entertainment? Is it a weekly paper that runs mostly briefs, and not many articles? Is it a daily paper that runs mostly articles, and not many briefs?

Many times people just develop a list of media contacts, and then send off press releases in bulk. This is ineffective. If you want a great response, a little extra effort will go a long way, and that means tailoring your release for different types of newspapers.

Some papers, usually smaller, local ones, focus on local content. The way to spark their interest is to highlight the local angle. Other newspapers serve a larger readership, and the local angle doesn't matter as much. In that case, an organization's national or statewide success, for example, may be more important.

You don't need to write a different press release for every single paper. But you should tailor releases for different types of papers.

How Do I Write a Press Release?

Following are the mechanics of writing a press release. If you've done all your preliminary homework, actually writing the release should be relatively easy:

- Step 1 – Decide why you are writing a press release and determine your focus.
- Step 2 – Keep it short and to the point. Usually, press releases are no more than one page.
- Step 3 – Print the words "FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE" in the top left-hand margin in all caps. Follow this line with relevant contact information: name, title, address, phone number, email address.
- Step 4 – Create a headline and center it in bold type just above the first line of the body of the press release. Headlines typically highlight the most important, significant or shocking fact in the release.
- Step 5 – Create a dateline - the first line of the body of your press release - that includes the city where the release is generated and the date (i.e. LOS ANGELES, CA. – January 1, 2009).
- Step 6 – Make certain the first paragraph includes all the vital information: the where, when, why, what and who.
- Step 7 – Include some tantalizing peripheral details or facts to spark curiosity in following paragraphs. A good press release not only informs but also teases.
- Step 8 – Wrap up the last paragraph with a "for additional information" line, a place to find more details (website, if you have one.)
- Step 9 – Center these marks " # # #" at the bottom of the page to indicate the end of your release.

An additional step (if necessary) – If your press release exceeds one page, the first page should state "MORE" at the bottom and the second page should indicate ' Page Two' in the upper right hand corner. Center the marks " # # #" at the bottom of the last page to indicate the end of your release.

Writing Tips

- Write in a clear, interesting way using a basic font (Times New Roman, Arial, etc.) Don't use multisyllabic, inflated words, when simple, common words will do.
- Always write it from a journalist's perspective (third person). Never use "I" or "we" unless it's in a quote.
- Shorter is better – if you can say it in two pages, great; if you can say it in one page, better.
- Avoid buzzwords (ex. "breakthrough", "unique", "state-of-the-art", "meet the needs of", etc.), corporate mumbo jumbo, unintelligible garbage, and the like.
- Speak the press' language. In most cases, newspapers use Associated Press style, or AP style. In many cases this is not the same as standard written English. Get yourself an AP Stylebook (often known as the Journalist's "Bible") and consult it regularly. They are available at www.apstylebook.com.

Quotes

There is no cardinal rule on using quotes in press releases. Sometimes quotes can infuse a human voice into the release. It can break up monotony and, especially if the individual is someone credible, can increase the impact of your release.

When using quotes, use only the word "said" to attribute quotes to an individual (Don't use "added," "exclaimed," "announced," etc. – it violates AP style)

Revise and Proofread - Several Times Over

Once written, read your press release over and check for spelling errors. Don't rely on your computer's spell check to find all errors. Hours and days of hard work can be wasted by typos that call your credibility into question.

Make sure your release is clear and simple, in other words something the average person could easily read all the way through.

Summary

Effective press releases follow certain basic conventions in the way of layout. But more importantly, they are timely, newsworthy, written clearly and concisely, and convey the most relevant facts in the most interesting way. They highlight an angle that is in line with the type of news that paper normally publishes. They are sent to the appropriate person at the appropriate time. They are free of spelling and grammatical errors, adhere to AP style, and steer clear of corporate fluff.

Finally, press releases are not a one-shot deal. When you consistently write and send good press releases, you become a reliable source of information for a newspaper. And when papers need a source in your field for a particular article, they may call you.

eNEWSLETTERS

eNewsletters can be a powerful marketing tool. They enable an association to maintain a relationship with its members, as well as to “nurture” prospects who aren’t yet quite ready to commit. They position your association as an industry expert, are far more cost-effective than printed mail, and are easy to create; but they have to be well crafted to stand out from the crowd.

7 Reasons to start a eNewsletter today

- 1) It complements your Web site like white wine to fish
- 2) eNewsletters are more cost-effective than print newsletters
- 3) eNewsletters are interactive – In a printed newsletter you can refer to your Web site but you have to hope that your readers don't mistype that URL when they go to their browser. With an eNewsletter you can make sure your site (or a PDF, or a sound clip, or any document available on the Web) is just a click away.
- 4) You can test its effectiveness – Depending on the sophistication of the program you are using to send out your newsletters you can track which links in your eNewsletter are being clicked on and which are being ignored.
- 5) eNewsletters encourage word-of-mouth advertising – It’s easy for your members to forward your eNewsletter to a friend or associate, especially with a friendly reminder from you at the end of each issue. It's also a great way to build your subscriber base and market your services to people you might not have reached any other way.
- 6) You're preaching to the choir – Your subscribers have signed up to receive your eNewsletter, so be sure to promote your offerings in the newsletter.
- 7) Starting today will help build your subscriber base – Now that eNewsletters can contain formatted text, embedded images and even polls and surveys you're no longer limited to boring plain text to get your message across. Soon you'll be able to include forms, multi-media, and other marketing tools that you can deliver to your members' mailboxes. The best way to grow your subscriber base and take advantage of these new tools is to start right away.

Common Tips for all Types of Newsletters

- Remember who your audience is and what the point of the newsletter is.
- Write clearly and remember that not everyone reads at the same level. Do not use jargon – not every member knows insider language, even if they are all involved in the same industry.
- Spell check your work and proof read it before you send it out.
- Give them something to think about or entice them to click on the web links by teasing them with a short on the content.

- Keep things to the point. Make it brief so that people will read through it, and then give the link to your site or to wherever they can find the remainder or the full version of the article in the newsletter.
- Remember to include some sort of contact information, whether it is an e-mail address, a phone number or just a link to a contact us form. Providing a way to get in touch with you builds confidence and trust in the reader.
- If you have a lot of points to make, but you also have a ton of paragraphs, bullets will help you reduce space and keep the readers eyes moving across the letter to completion.
- Don't go overdramatic on bright flashing colors and fancy fonts. As the saying goes "Too many accessories clutter an outfit" Too many distractions will clutter your letter.
- Consistency is a major key to success. Set a publishing schedule and stick to it. If your newsletter comes out on the same day every month, members will know when to look for it.
- Remember to source everything that is factual or written by others. This is especially important if you are making direct quotes, using trademarks or stating something that's validity is questionable.
- Fill your newsletter with articles that will be interesting to members at every level. Good ideas: human interest stories, member kudos and association news that applies to a wide range of people. Members like to read about themselves and their peers, not marketing slogans from the association.

Format and Technical Tips

- ✓ Most newsletters are between 8- 16 pages, but there are no restrictions. Some associations simply use a two-sided 8 1/2" x 11" sheet of paper. Your size will depend on how much information you want (and have available) to include.
- ✓ Produce a template for your layout and be consistent with it.
- ✓ Provide both HTML and plain text versions. Most hosted email services allow you to set this up automatically. Some readers prefer the nicer HTML look, while others won't be able to view an HTML version due to firewalls and filters.
- ✓ Use a professional and relevant subject line – the more reader interest-specific, the better. Subject lines that include phrases such as "How to...", "10 Signs It's Time To...", "Secrets of...", "10 Successful...", "_____ Challenges," "Advice for...", "Tips for...", "Trends in...", "Mistakes To Avoid When...", "_____ Demystified," "What To Watch Out For When...", and "Top Tactics for" are effective at grabbing your readers' attention.

- ✓ Give your newsletter one owner. To maintain consistency in format, tone, and delivery frequency, there needs to be one person in charge of bringing the newsletter together, even if there are multiple writers.
- ✓ Use a hosted email service. It is best to let a professional service handle the nuts and bolts of subscribes, unsubscribes, bounces, white-listing, CAN-SPAM compliance, and list management. There are a number of reasonably-priced hosted services that provide all of the basic list management functions, plus features such as allowing subscribers to select plain text or HTML email options, pre-built HTML templates, and detailed subscriber tracking reports.

What is an Op-Ed?

An op-ed is an opinion piece, often published in newspapers, and more recently in online publications. The term “op-ed” means opposite the editorial. In newspapers, it describes the common placement of an op-ed piece being on the page opposite an editorial. Op-eds are most often published by the author’s local newspaper, and can be regarding everything from major national (or international) news stories, to smaller local town issues.

Purposes of Op-eds

Op-eds are designed to offer a position, generally from an expert in the industry or subject area. In a general sense, op-eds are offered to educate members of the public about an issue, beyond what the media outlet may have been covering independently.

From a PR perspective, op-eds are about exposure, awareness, and image building. Exposure comes by the simple act of having someone’s name and thoughts shared publicly through the media. Op-eds can be used to raise awareness by bringing attention to political, social, or other issues of particular importance to both the writer of the op-ed and the public they’re trying to reach.

How to Get an Op-ed Published?

One of the most important factors in whether an op-ed piece will be published is whether or not its author has the appropriate experience or credentials in the subject matter to make them appear as an expert.

It’s easier to have an op-ed picked up by a local newspaper than a national publication, so start local when distributing the op-ed. An op-ed should only be distributed to one media outlet at a time. They’re not designed to be mass distributed.

How to write an Op-Ed?

In an op-ed, you essentially state your conclusion first. You make your strongest point up front, and then spend the rest of the op-ed making your case, or back filling with the facts. *Done right, it's persuasive writing at its best.* You will help the association win converts, gain high-quality publicity for the association, and you will be reaching the elite audience of opinion-makers who regularly read the op-ed pages.

Here's a checklist to keep your op-ed on track:

- ✓ Focus tightly on one issue or idea --- in your first paragraph. Be brief.
- ✓ Express your opinion and base it on factual, researched or first-hand information.
- ✓ Be timely, make it well-written (no grammatical, spelling errors, or lack of structure), use clear, powerful and direct language. Op-eds are usually interesting because they pertain to current events, not something that happened months ago.

- ✓ Be personal and conversational; it can help you make your point. No one likes a stuffed shirt.
- ✓ Have a clear editorial viewpoint. Provide insight, understanding: educate your reader without being preachy.
- ✓ Near the end, clearly re-state your position and issue a call to action. Don't philosophize.
- ✓ Have verve, and "fire in the gut" indignation to accompany your logical analysis.
- ✓ Avoid clichés and jargon. Appeal to the average reader. Clarity is paramount.
- ✓ Make it unique - Don't just give dry facts and statements. Be creative (without going overboard and making it unreadable). Are there personal stories you can use?
- ✓ Include a brief bio, along with your phone number, email address, and mailing address at the bottom.

WEBSITES

“A Web site is like a diner. It has a core arsenal of dishes that justify its existence, but it also must have a regularly changing specials menu that keeps its regular customers coming back for more.”

A common misconception companies have is that if they put up a website, people will visit it. In order to have a popular site, you've got to offer something to the user: information, interactivity, fun, freebies, etc.

People will judge your association by your website. A good website need not cost a lot of money; however, a badly designed website will almost certainly cost you more in lost business than the website itself or the money you “saved” by taking short cuts.

The web is an interactive, dynamic, and rapidly changing new communications medium that your website should reflect. Well-organized, edited, and timely original content set in an attractive, interactive, and consistent format are some traits of great websites.

The User and what they want

Behind every screen is a person. The only reason a website exists is to serve the person who has chosen to visit it.

A website should provide a productive, memorable and frustration free visit every time – one that enables a user to get to the information that they want as quickly and easily as possible.

Web users have short attention spans and want to see websites that are simple in design. If the site is too complicated the user will move on in frustration – simplicity is key.

What Makes a Good Website?

- ✓ Dominate a subject area; become *the* site for that subject.
- ✓ It gets right to the point. You can tell what it's about, and why you should read on, in the first screen.
- ✓ Contact information is all over the site. You know whom you are dealing with, where they are, and how to reach them.
- ✓ It's easy and logical in its organization, and you can get to the information you seek in just a couple of clicks.
- ✓ There are adequate links to move you about the site on each page, so you never get stuck on a page and have to use your back arrow to get out of it.
- ✓ Pages must load quickly. The only exception is if there is a good reason to wait, like a page with several floor plans to compare...The user should be warned ahead of time that "the page loads slowly, but it's worth it...."
- ✓ The page width is narrow enough to prevent having to scroll from side to side. Most viewers find this very irritating.

- ✓ Forms requiring personal or financial information are on a secure server, to protect it from prying eyes. You can tell a page is secure by the little padlock in the lower right corner of your screen.
- ✓ Text at the very top of the page will appear as the first couple of lines when you come up on a search engine. Make sure those key words are what you feel the viewer will need to know to click on a link to your site.

Build More Marketing And Communication Synergy For Your Association

The #1 rule in marketing and communications is stay in front of your members. Consistent Communication = Familiarity = Trust = Members. Long-term consistency in marketing and communication create SYNERGY.

All of your marketing and communication materials should have a consistent look. They should match. Your logo, style, colors, catch phrase, attitude, benefits package, and contact information should be on every document you print. That includes invoices, business cards, press releases, register receipts, shopping bags, brochures, pamphlets, letter head, and to the extent possible, your printed communication pieces.

Every printed marketing piece should have the same look and feel. There should be no question in your members' mind about which association is communicating with them [so don't copy another association's marketing scheme]. You want the member to see the consistent, unique look of your association.

If you change the overall look of your marketing strategy, you will break rule #1 - consistency. You didn't stop running your marketing piece, but you changed it so much that your members don't recognize it.

This is a particularly important point. Everyone you know [including yourself] will get really bored with your marketing and communications scheme. But only your members count. You will not bore your members. Do not change the overall look and feel of your marketing scheme unless you don't get the results you expect or need.

To the greatest extent possible, your marketing materials should cross-reference each other. If you have a great brochure, then advertise your brochure in your other communication efforts. Your newsletter should advertise your brochure and your web site. Your brochure should advertise your newsletter, catalog and/or website, etc.

Your fundamental association philosophy [your mission statement] should be communicated clearly and consistently to members, employees, the public, investors, and partners and suppliers at every point of contact. Your mission statement should go forth loud and clear to everyone, every time. Make it a prominent part of doing business.

Remember to list all of your points of contact [addresses, phone numbers, fax, e-mail, web site] on all of your marketing and communication materials.

Nothing will strengthen your marketing and communications more than delivering on your service promises.

What you are doing in some respects is creating an association brand. However, what you are really doing is using every communication outlet at your disposal to reinforce every other communication outlet that you have, which essentially creates SYNERGY. Your effectiveness goes up, and your marketing costs go down. You make more money – and that is what association marketing is all about.

Integrated Marketing Communication

Marketing guru Philip Kotler defined IMC as, "*the concept under which a company carefully integrates and coordinates its many communications channels to deliver a clear, consistent message*".

Coherence

Do your various marketing communications make sense together as a whole? Each message within your Marketing Communication Mix should be part of the "bigger picture" in how it relates to other messages and your core communication and marketing theme.

Consistency

Are your various marketing communications saying the same thing? The messages your members receive through your various communication efforts should not be contradictory and should all repeat your association's core-philosophy.

Continuity

How does your marketing message change over time? As well as coordinating communication tools and messages to be consistent, thought must be given to how the message you convey evolves through various stages in the marketing cycle.

Complementary

How does the sum of the parts of your communication effort come together?

The beauty of a well-managed Integrated Marketing Communication effort is when the complementary **SYNERGY** you create overall exceeds any one effort.