

Understanding the way the news media works

You have an announcement about hiring a new vice president, or the business's anniversary celebration, or a grand re-opening after extensive remodeling. Problem is, you're not sure where to send the press release. If you fax or e-mail it to the major metro daily, will it even be seen, let alone printed? Is it something the broadcast media (television, radio) will give more than just a passing glance?

The first question to ask yourself is, who do you really want to "read all about it?" If your customer base is primarily local, why are you targeting media outlets that go Valley-wide? Your best bet is a local community newspaper, which usually delivers once a week or once a month, and is very often hungry for local news to fill its pages.

Submitting your news release to a local newspaper is simple: Find out who they are, where they deliver, and the best way to submit your information. To determine the "who," check your own mailbox, or, if your business is in a different city than the one in which you live, call friends or other businesses in that community and find out what local paper they receive or advertise in. FinderBinder, or similar directories, are a great source too. Once you get a hold of someone at the local newspaper, make sure you find out how they prefer news and information to be submitted, including any accompanying photos; what the deadline date is; and when the newspaper will deliver.

GENERAL ADVICE

When submitting a news release for publication,



don't forget the all-important five W's: *Who, What, When, Where and Why*.

- **Who** is the press release from/about
- **What** is being promoted (fundraiser, new hire, re-opening, etc.)
- **When** is the event taking place/did the new hire join the company
- **Where** is the business/organization located (address), *and* where is the event happening, if different
- **Why** is it important for readers to know this information

It's also important to include things like contact phone numbers and prices (i.e. fundraiser tickets), if applicable. Remember, the more information you include, the less work the recipient has to do, and the more likely it is that the information will appear in print! Local papers often have very small staffs, and are more likely to run the releases that fit the publication's mission statement and don't require a lot of extra work to make it "readable." If the staffer has to make a phone call because information is missing, and the deadline is coming up fast, very likely the press release will be put into the ol' circular file instead!

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

When dealing with a community-oriented publication, remember, the more "local" the angle, the better. Locally owned businesses, or a local resident who serves on a board and can be interviewed for a lengthier story, or even a "local person does good" human interest angle is a great way to

give your release that extra edge over the others that are hitting the same mailbox.

Don't send a publication located in Surprise a press release about your business located in Fountain Hills. You are wasting your time and theirs. Spend some time doing some research, find your target area and target audience, and make a phone call or two to reach the right contact person.

Using a "scattershot" method (i.e. sending out 200 releases to every media outlet in the state) about your Chandler business hiring a new sales manager is a waste of your resources and money. Do you own a financial company? Focus on publications that have financial or business sections. If your business is located in Chandler, find out what local papers, online 'zines, etc. cover Chandler. Did one of your managers just finish his first marathon to raise funds for cancer research in honor of his deceased child/spouse/mother? That is a much more interesting story than a new sales manager! You might get a lot more copy run with this angle, and somewhere in there the business will be mentioned.

FORMAT DO'S AND DON'T'S

Most newspapers and other media outlets these days prefer e-mailed communication, with attached Word documents, or the press release pasted into the body of the e-mail. **WARNING:** Those of you who are using the new Microsoft Office will note that all

Word documents now end in .docx. Those of us operating in older systems (and there are a LOT of us still using older versions) can't open these documents. It's a frustration and a waste of time to have to ask that the press

release be re-sent in an older version of Word. If I'm on deadline, once again, it goes in the e-trash.

To avoid frustrating your media recipient, make

sure to either also attach the press release in an older version of Word, OR also copy and paste the text into the body of the e-mail as a backup. Let's face it, most of us on the receiving end don't care how pretty the design is or how many little graphics and logos you have in the press release. At the end of the day, we just want to be able to copy and paste the text, do a quick edit, and submit it to the queue. Help us achieve that task!!

PDFs are another common way to submit releases. However, PDFs that are locked and can't be copied and pasted are UNwelcome, as everything has to be re-keyed ... and who has time for that!

You might as well retire your fax machine. No one at any media outlet wants to have to key in submitted information, especially when there are so many other more convenient ways for us to receive it! Faxes go right in the recycling bin. End of story.

SUBMITTING ART

Don't attach high-res, big file photos to e-mailed releases before you know whether the recipient is even going to use the info or not. We don't like having to wait for a file to download because it has a large photo attached, and then it turns out it's not even useful for our publication! It is far better to simply note that "photos are available upon request." If we want them, we'll contact you!

Also, if the release is about an upcoming event, bear in mind that community papers have small staffs and they just can't send someone to everything!! So, if you know someone from your office or your client's company will be present at the event taking photos, note that at the bottom of the release: "Photos will be available following the event," or something similar.

Photos should be jpeg, 72 dpi or greater, and standard size (5x7 or greater, unless it's a head shot).

If you have any further questions about how to get your news to local media, don't hesitate to contact Teri Carnicelli, editor, at 602-277-2742, or teri@northcentralnews.net.

