

PR News

Building the bridge between PR and the bottom line.

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Special Report: PR Writing for the Web, E-Mail & More

5 Steps to Crafting Perfect PR Pitches for Your Small Business

By Andrew Hides

If you have a small business, getting a write-up in a local or national news outlet can be a great way to attract new customers. But many small business owners can't afford to hire a PR professional to pitch their story to editors and reporters.

That doesn't mean press coverage is out of reach, however. Anyone can pitch a story to a journalist—in fact, newspapers, magazines and online sites are constantly looking for interesting stories to tell. But being your own publicist takes some determination, a little courage and knowing a few tricks of the trade.

Most journalists prefer to be pitched by e-mail, so here are five tips for creating e-mail pitches that will increase your chances of generating coverage for your small business.

1. Know your story: This one may sound obvious, but just saying you run a winery or a graphic design firm isn't enough. You need a hook that makes the story newsworthy. For instance, do you provide an innovative or niche product or service? Do you bring an unconventional twist to a traditional business? Is there an unusual or inspiring backstory to how you got started? Every business is unique in some way; whatever sets yours apart is your story.

2. Make it timely: Another way to make your pitch newsworthy is timing it to coincide with a larger cultural event. Seasons, holidays, trends, elections,

weather, major sporting events all offer potential tie-ins for an article about your business. For instance, if you make chocolates, a few weeks before Valentine's Day might be the ideal time for a story about your business. Remember to send your e-mail pitch out well in advance of when you hope it will run to give the news outlet plenty of time fit it into their editorial calendar.

3. Target your pitch: Figure out which publications, Web sites or blogs your prospective customers are likely to read. (For instance, if you sell bridal gowns, *Guns & Ammo* probably wouldn't be your first choice). Don't forget local outlets as well as trade or special-interest publications that cater to your target customers. Pick the 10 in which you'd most like to see your offerings mentioned. Then—and this is very important—go through each publication to see if there's really a place where a story about your product or service would fit in. If you find a piece on a similar topic, make a note of the reporter's name so you can pitch him or her directly. If you don't see anywhere that an article about your offerings would fit, cross that publication off your list and move on.

4. Be courteous and respectful: Remember, reporters and editors are professionals. Their job is not to publicize your business—it's to inform and entertain their audience. Your job is to make their job easier by pitching them a

story that serves their needs and yours. Do not send a "To Whom it May Concern" form e-mail to 10 journalists. Tailor each pitch to the appropriate reporter, greet him or her by name and, if possible, briefly mention a previous article of theirs that you liked.

5. Keep it short: Most journalists are flooded with literally hundreds of pitches and press releases every day. So get right to the point: Your e-mail subject line should clearly state what your pitch is about. After your brief introduction, include two or three paragraphs—just enough information to allow the journalist to decide whether the story is right for them. And, of course, include all your contact information so they can follow up with you by phone if they need to.

Armed with these guidelines, you'll be ready to launch a mini-PR campaign for your business. Of course, there's a lot more to public relations than sending e-mail pitches, but it's a great, inexpensive place to start. **PRN**

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Make Your Business a Content Powerhouse

By Bill Miltenberg, PR News

Whether or not your role is strictly in PR or it overlaps with marketing, when you communicate on behalf of a brand, you must think of yourself both as a publisher and as a media producer. It's a war out there to gain the increasingly shrinking attention spans of existing and potential customers. In creating content, either for your organization's blog or your client's main Web site, you can not only increase your search rankings, but you can also consistently feed your social media channels.

At the 2012 Content Marketing World event in Columbus Ohio, C.C. Chapman, author of *Content Rules* and prominent dad blogger/content creator, offers five tips that communicators need to know for using content to build their business.

1. Develop a strategy: "Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I will spend the first four hours sharpening the axe" —Abraham Lincoln. "People want to just jump right in and start with their handful of ideas and expect results right away, but it's crucial to take the time to develop a strategy," says Chapman. "Why are we

doing this? Are we doing this for the right reason? What is our budget? How can we make content creation sustainable?"

2. Get your house in order: Every social network is simply rented land; you don't own it, says Chapman. Get your house (Web site) in order by downloading or buying an intuitive content management system (CMS) that enables you to post content on a regular basis. "Make sure you can update it and publish, not the flaky tech intern or the IT guy that seems to work in an undisclosed closet location," says Chapman.

You also must establish a social media presence, especially on Facebook. "Even if you only use social platforms to drive traffic to your Web site, that's a start," says Chapman. "You can at least use them as beachheads, to send customers to your site to up-sell them and have them buy products."

3. Develop an editorial calendar: Applications and interfaces like Google Docs and Google Calendar are especially useful for team collaboration, says Chapman. "Start with the next month and go from there—figure out your next seasonal sale period (or find your

business' equivalent) and lay out whatever that time frame is and figure out what you can do content wise," says Chapman.

4. Think visually: "It kills me that it took something like Pinterest to make everyone realize we need pictures," says Chapman. "Words are great, but pictures are even better." Remember that when you share any piece of content on a social network (aside from Twitter), it's going to pull a picture from the content and show it as a preview. Chapman also warns against using a lack of technology and money as an excuse. "Your smartphone can take beautiful pictures. Take a picture, Instagram it and slap it in your blog post," says Chapman.

5. Play to your strengths: If you're a writer or if you're into photography, build on your skill sets and talents and figure out how they can best fit into your strategy, says Chapman. Remember, if your content campaign is successful you will have to keep feeding the beast with more content. If you can consistently create content around or via something you enjoy or have strength in, it will be easier to manage on those tougher days. **PRN**

Mistakes to Avoid When Writing a Professional Bio

By Andrew Hindes

A professional bio is a bit like an auto club card, you may not need it very often, but when you do, you'll be really glad you have one. All professionals and business leaders, from athletes to CFOs to pediatricians to DJs, should have at their disposal a few well-written paragraphs recounting their career accomplishments. A brief bio is indispensable for use in social media profiles, company Web sites,

press releases, event programs, brochures, book jackets and more.

So as a PR and marketing copywriter, I'm continually amazed at how many people, even A-list actors and C-level executives, don't have up-to-date, cleanly written bios at their fingertips. And when I ask clients for their bios, to include them in press or marketing materials, they often respond

with such a combination of guilt and dread you'd think I'd asked them to tell me their 401k account balance.

In reality, writing a good professional bio is nothing to be afraid of—as long as you avoid a few common pitfalls.

1. Writing in the First Person: Even if you're writing your own bio, take a page out of the Herman Cain/Bob Dole

playbook and refer to yourself in the third person. Whoever the subject is, call them by their full name the first time you mention them and just their last name on subsequent references. (The one exception to this rule is social media profiles; the convention there is to be less formal and write in the first person).

2. Starting at the beginning: Like resumes, bios should generally start with the present and work backwards chronologically. The reason for this is simple: the purpose of a bio is to describe what sets the subject apart professionally. For most people, that's going to be the major accomplishments of their adult lives—not their formative years. Sure, Meryl Streep studied acting at Vassar. But so did lots of people. No one else has been nominated for 17 Oscars, though. That's why it's a good idea to begin with a summary statement that includes the subject's current position or occupation as well as their most significant recent accomplishment.

Example: Robert Smith has served as president of XYZ Corp. since 2009. Over the past three years he has overseen the largest revenue growth in the company's history.

3. Padding: There's no need to add flowery language or extraneous informa-

tion to make a bio longer. Three or four paragraphs are sufficient to describe the major milestones of most people's careers. And while some extremely accomplished people may need more than four, for someone relatively new to his or her profession or someone who has worked for the same company most of their lives, one or two may be enough.

4. TMI: Remember, it's called a professional bio for a reason. No one needs to know about the subject's childhood nickname, parents' occupations or favorite color. Save that for the memoir—or at least the Wikipedia entry. That said, it's fine to briefly mention a few personal details, such as college and graduate school degrees, charitable activities, hobbies, passions and marital status, in the last sentence or two.

Example: Richardson is a past chairman of the Save the Snail Campaign. A graduate of Howard University, he is an avid skier. He lives with his wife and two children in Pittsburgh.

5. Lying: A bio should never include fabricated accomplishments, awards, titles or positions. Besides the obvious moral issue, false claims are easy to disprove in the digital age and the potential fallout from getting caught in a lie far outweighs

any benefits of exaggerating one's achievements.

6. Hyperbole: Phrases to avoid: "the greatest actor of his generation," "the most innovative businessman of the past decade," "the most beloved author of all time"...you get the idea.

7. Modesty: At the same time, there's no reason to play down the subject's accomplishments. Remember to include professional awards, accolades, honorary degrees, titles, etc. And needless to say, never mention anything negative or unflattering.

8. Quotes: A short bio is not the place for personal statements about the subject's inspirations, life philosophy or artistic vision. Nor is it the place for review blurbs or client testimonials.

9. Humor: Avoid the temptation to be clever or jokey. Humor and irony rarely work in a professional bio. Unless you are a paid comedy writer—and the bio is to be used only to promote a comedic project—keep your tongue out of your cheek and stick to the facts.

Avoid these mistakes and you'll never find yourself stranded by the side of the road wishing you had a better bio. **PRN**

Beyond Grammar: 7 Essential Elements of Effective PR Writing

By Andrew Hides

I wrote an article for PR News about the importance of using proper grammar when writing public relations materials, even in our digital age of texting shorthand, hashtags and 140-character tweets. Judging by the number of times it has been shared via social media, the piece struck a chord with readers. It was heartening to see how many people are passionate about the correct use of the English language. But while we can all agree on the value of weeding out typos and adhering to stylistic conventions, in today's crowded media environment, simply avoiding grammatical mistakes isn't enough to make your press materials stand out.

In my work as a PR writing instructor, I strive to help clients write effectively—not just correctly. Here are seven essential elements of good PR writing that will help make your press materials clearer, more concise and more compelling to journalists and other readers:

1. Planning: Before you start

writing, know your objectives, who your target audience is and what types of outlets you'll be pitching.

2. Storytelling: It's been said that good stories happen to those who can tell them. Honing your storytelling chops will make whatever you're writing—whether it's a corporate profile, a press release or a Facebook update—more engaging.

3. Empathy: Put yourself in the readers' shoes and focus on their interests and needs rather than yours or your client's.

4. Context: Help journalists—and their readers—understand the broader significance of your story and how it fits into the larger context of your industry, your community or the world.

5. Flow: Good writing has a rhythm that carries the reader along like a catchy melody. Pay attention to the way you transition between ideas, where you put your paragraph breaks and even the sounds of the individual words and sentences.

6. Structure: The way you organize a story—which ideas you present and in what order—can have a major impact on whether a reader hits delete halfway through the first paragraph or reads it all the way till the end.

7. Accuracy: The best writing in the world won't matter if you get your facts wrong.

Good grammar is like wearing nice clothes for a job interview. Sure, it's important, and failing to do so can be a deal-breaker, but just showing up in a suit and tie is not going to land you the job. Similarly, poor grammar can be a turn-off to journalists, but merely demonstrating your ability to use a semicolon properly isn't going to generate press coverage for your company or clients.

To increase the chances of your press release or email pitch getting picked up, tell your story well, in language that is engaging and easy to understand. **PRN**

What Steve Jobs Taught Us About Writing Press Releases

By Andrew Hinds

What's the least interesting part of almost every business press release written these days? The second paragraph. Why?

Because it usually contains an executive quotation that's as bland and insincere as it is meaningless. Let's face it, if American businesspeople were all as "thrilled," "excited" and "pleased" as they claim to be in press release quotes, the world would be a much happier—albeit more boring—place.

But worse than being an eye-glazing convention, generic executive quotes are actually a waste of a unique opportunity. Because they are attributed to a person rather than an organization, quotes can be used to communicate subjective ideas and context that can't be expressed in the more objective, journalistic language of the rest of the release.

And by virtue of being surrounded by quotation marks, they are usually published verbatim in the media rather than being edited or paraphrased (unless of course they're ignored altogether for being too dull or fluff-filled).

The late Apple and Pixar CEO Steve Jobs, arguably the most successful business leader of the past quarter century, was famously unafraid to be provocative in print. He was also a master at conveying bold ideas in a few sentences. While not every executive is comfortable going as far as Jobs did in flouting the status quo—and even Jobs' press release quotes were sometimes by the numbers—we can learn a lot about writing compelling press release quotes from public statements he made over the years.

Here are a few examples of what a press release quotation can convey, accompanied

by things Jobs said (or were attributed to him):

1. Brand personality: By using more colorful, colloquial language, a quote can communicate a sense of individuality, passion, fun and—if used judiciously—even a sense of humor, that sets a business apart from its competitors.

"We made the buttons on the screen look so good you'll want to lick them."—On the Mac OS X Aqua user interface, Fortune (Jan. 4, 2000).

2. A subjective viewpoint: While it should avoid hyperbole and breathless adjectives, the executive quote offers a chance to describe the significance of an announcement in qualitative, rather than quantitative terms.

"iPod touch is the funnest iPod we've ever created."—Press release (Sept. 9, 2008).

3. Bold statements: An executive quote can sometimes get away with provocative statements or predictions.

"We believe it's the biggest advance in animation since Walt Disney started it all with the release of Snow White 50 years ago."—Discussing Pixar's Toy Story in Fortune (Sept. 18, 1995)

4. Positioning and context: In order to help readers reach a conclusion that may not be obvious from the facts alone, a quote can "connect the dots" for journalists and the public.

"iPhone 3G had a stunning opening weekend. It took 74 days to sell the first 1 million original iPhones, so the new iPhone 3G is clearly off to a great start around the world."—Press Release announcing sales of 1 million iPhone 3Gs in its first weekend (July 14, 2008)

5. Nuance: Sometimes an announcement will raise questions in the minds of

more sophisticated readers that may not occur to a more general readership. The executive quote offers a way to address an issue without drawing attention to it.

"This is a good day for Apple's shareholders—they will have even more independent representation on their Board, the addition of a terrific new director in former Vice President Al Gore and a reduction in issued stock option overhang from 23% to 16%."—Press release announcing changes amidst criticism of Apple's corporate governance (March 20, 2003)

6. Positive spin: When the news isn't good, an executive quote can soften the blow by pointing out more upbeat aspects of the story. This has to be done carefully though: executives should avoid sounding Pollyannaish, or worse, deceitful or cavalier, by trying to put a happy face on bad news.

The key is to first acknowledge the problem and then counterbalance it with an optimistic (but truthful) appraisal.

"Looking forward, we do not expect our industry to pick up anytime soon, though we're hoping to help put a lot of iPods, iMacs and iBooks under trees this holiday season. With the stability of our rock-solid balance sheet, Apple will continue to invest through this downturn to create the industry's most innovative products and best buying experience."—Press release announcing an Apple quarterly loss (Oct. 16, 2002).

So whether you're a business leader or a PR professional (or both), the next time you craft an executive quote, try tapping into your inner Steve Jobs. You might just be thrilled, excited and pleased with the results. **PRN**

Time to Adopt the Newsjacker's Motto: Always Be Prepared

By Scott Van Camp, PR News

When backup signal caller Tim Tebow was sent to the New York Jets, the famed New York Midtown institution, the Carnegie Deli, announced that it had concocted a sandwich in his honor. The "Jetbow" is a 3.5-pound monstrosity filled with corned beef, pastrami, roast beef, American cheese, lettuce and tomato on white bread, reported the *New York Post*.

In Nov. 2012, as President Obama was

set to visit Australia, the chief minister of the Northern Territory announced that it would provide "crocodile insurance" for the commander-in-chief (as if rising gas prices aren't enough of a threat).

Call it what you will—piggybacking, newsjacking or real-time marketing—the fact is, taking some breaking news that is not yours and making it your own has been going on in one form or another

since the dawn of media relations.

Now, however, because of digital/social PR and the 24/7 news cycle, this already solid PR strategy has become even more effective, given the bountiful news popping up around the world—and Google Alerts.

The practice has come to the PR forefront to such a degree that marketing/PR guru David Meerman Scott has written an e-book about it: *Newsjacking: How*

to Inject Your Ideas Into a Breaking News Story and Generate Tons of Media Coverage (Wiley, 2012).

In the past, says Scott, media relations pros have taken advantage of newsjacking in a couple of ways: 1) leveraging an event that you know is coming, like the Super Bowl, and 2) reach out “manually” to reporters to get their attention. Those days are gone, says Scott. “What is different now is that Google indexes in real time, creating a piece of content that reporters will find at that precise moment,” he says. “That’s why the technique for newsjacking is different now.

NEED FOR SPEED

And the major component of this technique, says Scott, is speed. For many companies, speed is scary. If they want to partake in real-time communications, there is no time to check with the lawyers to see if a story angle is OK.

The problem is that PR pros spend a lot of time on long-term planning. “They forget about ‘right now,’” says Scott. Yet “now” is when the opportunity is. Scott tells the story of B2B software company Eloqua, and how it newsjacked the story about a competitor, Market2Lead, that was acquired by software giant Oracle.

Within two hours after Oracle issued a rote press release about its acquisition, the CEO of Eloqua had written a blog post relating how great Oracle’s acquisition was for the industry, filling in the blanks of the press release with great information and context.

Then Eloqua e-mailed a link to that

post to every Market2Lead customer for which it had an address. The result was more than \$1 million worth of new business to Eloqua. Who says ROI is difficult to prove in PR?

GIVE IT THE SMELL TEST

All of this sounds bulletproof, but there has to be a smell test before you commit an act of newsjacking. “There are times when it’s distasteful to jump on the bandwagon of a story,” says Dave Armon, president of marketing/PR monitoring service Critical Mention. Armon gives the example of a former client that made fire detectors. When news of a fatal fire broke, the company would send out a press release that stated: “This is an example of a death that didn’t have to happen.” Granted, the company did it through the guise of a “safety institute,” but the message was much too obvious and harsh.

On the cusp of newsjacking bad taste was *Hustler* magazine’s Larry Flynt, who jumped on Anthony Weiner’s resignation after the New York politician was caught with his pants down on the Internet. The day Weiner resigned, Flynt decided he wanted to be in the “second paragraph” of the national story, says Scott. So he publicly offered Weiner a job at *Hustler* as VP of the Internet division.

There is only one Larry Flynt, however. So Armon says you need to ask yourself, “Is piggybacking off this news in good taste and on message?”

FLAGGING HOT TOPICS

Yet there are companies that don’t shy away from the speed of real-time commu-

nications. CSC, a B2B software company, scans the news daily for opportunities. “If a hot topic falls within our expertise, we immediately flag it to a subject matter expert,” says Chris Grandis, corporate director of global public relations at CSC.

When the White House announced its “Big Data” plan on March 29, Grandis pushed the news to a subject matter expert, who quickly wrote a bylined article on the subject that was pitched to the media.

CSC often gives context to breaking news stories through posts on its blog, Executive Views, which then gets pushed out to the media. On a more breaking basis, if there’s a security breach story, for example, CSC experts are quickly offered to a variety of outlets for comment.

Grandis says there are parameters that are followed when riffing on breaking news: They must have an expert who can address the topic; and the news source must be credible—a reputable business or trade publication.

Being ready to handle a media onslaught if your newsjacking strategy works is critical, says Armon. So that means making sure that you are nimble enough and have the resources to jump into media relations in real time. Not being prepared for what’s to come could put the focus on your organization’s ineptitude instead of the story.

That’s why Armon is an advocate for communicators having the skills and the freedom to act quickly and decisively. Amen. **PRN**

Follow Scott Van Camp: @svancamp01

How to Write Headlines That Pop in a Journalist’s Inbox

By Andrew Hinds

If you’ve taken time out of your busy day to read this article, it’s probably because the headline piqued your interest. Given the massive amounts of information published online every day, it’s no wonder we rely on headlines to help us figure out what we want to read—or think we should read—and what we can safely ignore.

That’s even more true for journalists, who not only have to stay on top of all the latest news, opinion and gossip pertaining to their beats, but also must sift through the literally hundreds of press releases, media alerts and e-mail pitches they receive every day. That’s why it’s so impor-

tant that your press materials start with compelling, informative headlines (or, in the case of e-mail pitches, subject lines).

While there are some differences between journalistic headlines and PR headlines, there are many similarities. In both cases the writer has just a handful of words to persuade the reader to click on a link or continue reading. So to learn the secrets of writing great headlines, we turned to three seasoned newspaper editors—one of whom is now a successful PR practitioner. Here are their top tips for writing headlines that cut through the clutter and stand out in journalists’

inboxes.

Be concise. Headlines need to convey as much essential information in as few words as possible. “Avoid fluff or padding,” says Lisa Horowitz, copy chief at the L.A. Weekly. “Don’t put the entire story in the headline—one of the main goals of a headline is to entice the reader, without spelling out everything the story has to offer.” The journalist should know just enough from reading the headline to determine if the story might be of interest to them and their readers.

Don’t overpromise. It’s tempting, in an effort to grab journalists’ attention, to

exaggerate the content of a release (“New Cell Phone Cures the Common Cold!”). Avoid this. Editors and reporters are sensitive to hype and will not look favorably on a press release or pitch that doesn’t deliver on its headline. “It truly annoys me to see a tease that doesn’t live up to its promise,” says Horowitz.

Humor is good—but not at the expense of clarity. The best editorial copyeditors are adept at crafting witty headlines, like *Variety*’s famed “Stix Nix Hix Pix.” Monica Roman Gagnier, business copyeditor for the *New York Post*, recently paid homage to that classic with “Shock! Wall Street flocks to stock of mocked Crocs,” which topped a piece about a rise in the share price of the maker of colorful plastic clogs, despite the fact that the shoes are often ridiculed. In addition to rhyming and alliteration, Gagnier notes that common ways to have fun with headlines include replacing words in popular song and movie titles and common expressions. But while journalists appreciate a clever turn of phrase as much, if not more, than most readers, PR headlines shouldn’t risk being obscure for the

sake of joke or a play on words—no matter how ingenious. If you’re not sure if you’re being too clever, says Horowitz, show the headline to some people who know nothing about the announcement and see if they understand it.

Make sure the tone of the headline matches the story. “Use turns of phrase or cleverness only when it’s in keeping with the announcement—and the brand making the announcement,” says Jonathan Taylor, founder of entertainment corporate communications firm JT Media Works and a 25-year news veteran. For instance, a press release about a new soda might benefit from a fun, light headline. A release about a new cancer therapy? Not so much.

Put your client’s name in the headline. I know, it seems obvious, but you’d be surprised how often it’s overlooked. According to Taylor, the main client—whether it’s an individual, a company or a brand—should always be named in the main headline, preferably in the first line. But beware of “top-heavy headlines,” he cautions. “When there are multiple companies, or news components, involved in an announce-

ment, the temptation is to include them all in the headlines and sub-headlines. But there’s something off-putting about the first page of a release that’s all main deck, subhead, sub-subhead, etc.”

Stick with the third person. Ad copy often addresses the reader directly, in the second person, like so: “Get ready for the biggest blockbuster of the summer!” or “You’ll Love XYZ’s New, Improved Formula!” Press releases, however, should always use the third person (and avoid subjective statements): “Box Office Analysts Predict Godzilla Will Be the Biggest Movie of the Summer,” “XYZ Announces New Formula That Actually Works.” Why use third person? Because the journalist is not intended to be the end user of the information you are conveying—or in most cases, the brand, product or service you are touting. Their readers are.

When in doubt, change it. If you’re not sure if your headline is strong enough, it probably isn’t, says Horowitz. “You know a good (or better, a great) headline when you see it.” PRN

6 Reasons Why I Would Unsubscribe From Your E-Newsletter

By Andrew Hides

If you’re like most PR professionals, sifting through the mountain of e-mail you receive every day can feel like a full-time job. On the one hand, there are the important business and personal messages you try to read immediately. On the other, there is the outright spam you delete with barely a glance. And somewhere in between are the dozens of newsletters, bulletins and updates from media outlets, nonprofit organizations, political groups, professional associations and various businesses that you have to decide what to do with.

Maybe you create similar mass e-mails on behalf of your company or your clients. Doing so can be a very cost-effective way of communicating with customers, employees, investors or association members. Of course, it only works if they continue to receive—and read—what you send them. Given the volume of e-mail we are all inundated with, the challenge is delivering a newsletter that recipients will see as a benefit rather than a nuisance.

I don’t think I’m unusual in letting these subscriptions multiply until my inbox becomes unmanageable. At that

point, I go through and unsubscribe from all the e-mails that aren’t earning their keep. Would your newsletter make the cut? If you’re guilty of one or more of the following marketing sins, the answer is no:

It’s all about you – E-mails that always ask me for something—typically my money or my business—quickly wear out their welcome. A newsletter needs to provide information that’s compelling or useful to me if I’m going to stay subscribed.

It comes too often – Didn’t you just send me one of these, like, yesterday? While it’s hard to determine the exact right frequency for distributing e-mail updates, unless you are providing truly essential, timely information, it’s safe to say you should be measuring it in weeks, not days.

There’s no reason to open it – I recently got an e-mail from my cell phone company entitled “Your Verizon Media Store Newsletter Has Arrived!” Beyond its hilariously misplaced breathlessness, this headline tells me nothing about the contents of the newsletter. So I had no reason to open it—except to scroll to the bottom and click “unsubscribe.” Compare that to a recent

newsletter I received from Corporate Ink, a tech-savvy PR firm based in Boston, that led with the question: “What does it take to make a new hire successful?” As someone who runs a small company, I thought that one was worth a look.

It lacks a consistent voice – Your newsletter should have a tone and look that matches your brand and resonates with your target audience. For instance, KCRW, a public radio station in Los Angeles known for its eclectic music programming and intelligent arts and public affairs shows, has a smart, hip newsletter that offers tips on cool cultural activities happening in L.A. Bull’s-eye.

It’s always a downer – We all get our daily dose of depressing news. If your organization’s e-mail is full of doom and gloom, I’ll hit delete as fast as I change the channel on those Sarah McLachlan commercials with the pictures of abandoned dogs and cats. It’s not that I don’t care, but if the situation is presented as too hopeless, I’m less likely to get out my credit card and more likely to get myself off your e-mail list.

There’s no focus – All the information you provide should be related to your orga-

nization's core business and, more importantly, to my interests. Don't just send me a random smattering of generic "helpful tips"—household finance hints, gardening advice and weight-loss techniques, etc. I

already get Parade in my Sunday paper, thanks.

Of course, I may not be your target reader. But whoever he or she is, I bet they share some of my criteria for what makes

an e-mail worth the space it takes up in their inbox—and their busy day. If you want to keep them away from the "unsubscribe" link, make sure your newsletter doesn't fall into any of these traps. **PRN**

Tips for Optimizing News Releases for Social Media

By Bill Miltenberg, PR News

While the press release is not dead by any means, a plain-text version is quickly becoming an anachronism in the digital age. A well-written release packed with punchy quotes is still a fundamental way to tell your brand's story to the media, but it's when PR pros optimize their releases (and online media centers, too) for social media and search that they can really maximize their reach.

Sally Falkow, social media strategist at Meritus Media, says it's essential to integrate social media within press releases. "You want to make sure that you have sharing buttons on every piece of your content—videos, infographics, press releases, articles." It is all news content and should be treated as such. Below, Falkow provides six tips for optimizing a news release for social media.

Include Photos: "Adding images and video increases views on your news content by as much as 77%, according to a PR

Newswire study," says Falkow. However, this might not be the place to insert your brand's. Opt for more professional, high-resolution and standard format (typically JPEG) photos.

Provide Options: "Add more than one image, so that there is a choice for bloggers and journalists," says Falkow. This allows them to choose an image that fits their take on the story. Supply source codes and URLs for all images. Also consider including charts, slide decks, PDFs and infographics. If you're including an executive's take in the release—especially if they're quotes that Steve Jobs would be proud of—include their photo and add links to their bios and social profiles.

Keep Things Interesting: "Pin all images to a Pinterest board and link back to the press release in your newsroom," says Falkow. Pinterest is a great visual medium, an effective touch point for influencers, a valuable information aggregator

and a perfect platform for sharing. (Not on Pinterest yet? Consider these 5 tips for kick-starting your efforts today.)

Add a short video: "85% of all media Web sites now use video, and many of them are looking for completed videos from an outside source," says Falkow. Supply the embed code for the video so that they can immediately embed it on their Web site or blog, and pin the video to the Pinterest board.

Highlight Keywords: "Tag all the content with the keywords that will make it easy to find in search or social sites to boost your SEO efforts," says Falkow. "Use words you think a journalist might use to search for when writing story on a topic."

Include Icons: Add icons that connect to all social content from the company and provide social sharing links so others can like your news on Facebook, tweet it right from your news release, post it to a host of other social sites or e-mail it to friends. **PRN**

5 Ways to Reinvent the Press Release With SEO

By Vanessa Bugasch, Cision

Social media has helped transform the press release and given it new life, a vastly larger audience and a huge role in generating traffic to your organization's Web site. As such, search engine optimization (SEO) is important to the success of today's press release. Optimized press releases attract consumers and influencers, as well as journalists—and pull them into your story.

To get the biggest bang out of SEO, you may need to change the way you write your release. Some basic, traditional best practices still apply, but here are five tips to keep in mind to optimize your releases:

1. Choose the Right Keywords

Search engines think like your audience. Before you begin to write, know the

keywords or phrases that will drive them to the news release and motivate them to click through to pages on your Web site. Do basic keyword research on sites like Google AdWords, Wordtracker or Keyword Discovery.

2. Use Your Heads

Use one to two keywords in the headline and subhead. Search engine spiders read left to right, so take that into account as you compose your headlines and your first paragraph. Use no more than 200 characters in the summary or subhead.

3. Optimize From the Top Down

Spiders also read from the top down. Using keywords in the first two paragraphs makes a much bigger impact than using

them lower down. As you write, think in sound bites, like 140-character tweets.

4. Don't Over-Link

As with keywords, don't overdo anchor text, as it causes confusion and dilutes the impact of the links themselves. Offer two to three links for a 400-word press release.

5. Use Multimedia

Research shows that press releases with pictures, video and other multimedia get at least 80% more search traffic than text-only releases. They're usually more appealing and interesting, too. You'd be surprised how easy it is to create your own video or add visuals that support your product, message or campaign. **PRN**