How To Write and Syndicate an SEO-friendly Press Release

By Jason McDonald

In the pre-Internet days, PR professionals focused their words and efforts at human editors. Beyond having great personal contacts, writing a "catchy" headline for a press release meant writing something witty, unusual, shocking, provocative or all of the above—a headline that would catch an editor's attention. Nowadays, that still matters, but there is a new element of growing importance: SEO, or Search Engine Optimization.

Media training today needs to include SEO as a key part of how to create effective press releases. Today's press release headlines must be catchy for sure, but they must also weave the target keywords into the appropriate HTML positions of the release, position the release on one's Web site for maximum attractiveness to Google, and push out the press release via free or paid press release syndication services.

Follow these five steps to master the art of crafting effective press releases for SEO:

1. Identify your target keywords.
2. Write a keyword-heavy press release with keywords in the right positions.
3. Upload the press release to your Web site following SEO best practices.
4. Syndicate your press release using SEO tag techniques.
5. Measure your results to learn what works.

Before we examine the steps, let's discuss two important issues.

First, why do press releases help SEO? Press releases help your SEO strategy (getting to the top of Google) in these ways:

- Press releases feed the 24/7 news cycle. Press releases create new content for your Web site, and by being syndicated on blogs, portals, and news sites, they create new content across the Web. Users can find that content on Web sites other than your own and thereby find out about your company or organization.
- Press releases bring freshness to your Web site. When posted to your Web site, press releases "freshen" your Web site. This helps your SEO because Google rewards Web sites with new and relevant content, especially when those items are keyword heavy and are featured on your home page with "one click" links.
- Done correctly, press releases are an easy way to build inbound links. Across the Web, syndicated press releases via services like PRLOG.org and PRWeb create links back to your Web site. Google interprets links to your Web site as votes, giving priority in Google rankings to sites with more links. Press release syndication is one of the easiest link strategies for SEO.

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Second, shouldn't one worry that generating a large quantity of press releases will annoy the human editors and bloggers who are the traditional targets of press releases? This is a common concern, but it is misplaced. The solution is to create two tracks for your press releases.

On track one, some press releases will target the 24/7 news cycle, broad Internet, and Google. You will not e-mail your editor contact list for most of your SEO press releases because the standard of what counts as news is much, much lower for SEO than for human editors. On track two, other press releases will target your human editors with content that meets a higher standard of what constitutes news. In a sense, you can have your cake and eat it too: some press releases will target just Google and the broad Internet, while other press releases will target human editors.

Below are five important principles for training:

1. Identify your target keywords.

Keywords drive SEO, because customers type keywords into Google and the entire process revolves around those keywords. Let's assume you are an industrial fan manufacturer. Your keyword targets might be:

- Industrial fans
- Commercial fans
- Commercial fans for agriculture
- Commercial fans for factories
- Used industrial fans

For most businesses, your product or services target both broad applications and narrow, specific keywords. Your press releases will reflect both these broad and narrow targets. That's where keywords come in. Once you have the idea for a press release—a new product or service, a speech that your CEO gave at a trade show, an award your company won from an industry association, a new office opening somewhere or even a new director of marketing—you need to refine the keywords that you will focus your press release on.

Many companies write their press release first, and then worry about keywords. Reverse this process. Make keyword discovery the first step in an SEO-friendly press release.

Fortunately there are wonderful free tools for keyword research. These tools poll your customers and tell you what keywords are searched in higher volumes on Google.

Let's assume you have the concept for your press release. In our example, you are producing a new industrial fan targeting agricultural uses. Go to Google and start typing in "industrial fan." Pay attention to the suggested words and phrases via Google's autocomplete feature, officially called Google Suggest. You'll see suggestions such as industrial fan manufacturers, industrial fans for sale, industrial fans rental. Type the full phrase, "industrial fans for agriculture" and then on the left of the Google screen, click on "show search tools" and then "related searches."

Clicking on "related searches" reveals a list of searches related to "industrial fans for agriculture" You'll see suggestions such as "industrial fans for ag" "industrial fans for crops" and "industrial fans for animal science." You can click on any one of these and on the far right, Google will create a link called "more like this." Google Suggest and related searches are your best starting points to see what types of keywords and key phrases people actually type into Google.

Next, go to the Google Keyword Tool which you can find just by Googling "Google AdWords Keyword Tool" or just enter this URL: http://bit.ly/google-kt. Sign in to your

Google account (or set one up if you don't have one), and then enter your keywords. Type your target keyword into the tool. On the left, select "phrase" and check the box that says "Only show ideas closely related to my keyword terms." Google will then give you a wonderful list of keywords and phrases closely related to the word you typed in. You can also sort by volume, by clicking on the volume column. For a video on how to use this tool more effectively go to http://bit.ly/UpW5IX.

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At the end of this process, you should have a good sense of a target keyword phrase such as "Industrial Fans for Crops and Agriculture" that can become the central focal point of your SEO-friendly press release.

2. Write a keyword-heavy press release with keywords in the right positions.

Now that you have your keyword target, you need to write an SEO-friendly press release. A good SEO-friendly press release consists of the following elements:

First, write a strong press release headline that contains your target keyword or key phrase. It needs to be short (less than 80 characters), as it will become the title tag of your press release and the headline visible on a Google search. So in our example, something like "New Industrial Fans for Agriculture and Crops Released by Jason's Fan Company" would be a good SEO-friendly headline.

Second, write a short kicker or description (less than 155 characters) that describes the release and contains the keyword phrase. This will become your meta description—this is the visible description on Google and, on many syndication services, the kicker text beneath the headline. Use http://www.lettercount.com/ to count your characters.

Third, write a standard press release introductory paragraph, but be sure that this first paragraph contains the target keyword phrase. This is because later on we will link to this phrase. Write a quotation paragraph by your CEO or spokesperson. After that, write a "more information" paragraph that says, "For more information go to" and then produce an http:// link, as in http://www.jasonsfans.com/industrial-fans. This would be the page on your Web site

that you want to promote, such as the product page. Be sure to include the complete http:// phrasing (not just www). This is very important.

Finally, write supporting paragraphs and be sure to include the keyword phrase many times within the press release. This helps the SEO as it raises the keyword density of the phrase in the press release as a whole.

3. Upload the press release to your Web site following SEO best practices.

Now that you have written your press release, it is time to upload the release to your Web site. Many people are using CMS systems like WordPress or Joomla. Whichever you choose, log into it and input your press release. Be sure that it follows SEO best practices—meaning that the HTML tags outputted on the web contain the relevant keyword as follows.

Title Tag. Your press release headline should become the title tag in HTML, less than 80 characters. It must contain your target keyword phrase.

Meta Description Tag. Your press release kicker/meta description should be less than 155 characters. It must contain your target keyword phrase.

Meta Keywords Tag. This tag is ignored by Google. So don't worry about it.

Press Release Content. This is your actual press release content, making sure that it has the keyword phrase in the first paragraph, an http:// link in the third paragraph and strong keyword density for the entire release for the target keyword phrase.

Image. If possible, add an image and, in the IMG tag, make sure that the ALT attribute of that image contains the keyword phrase.

At the end of this process, your press release should be live on your Web site. Do a "view source" to look at the HTML code and verify that it meets the criteria above. Finally, link your press release from your home page to your press release with a "one click" link. This will freshen your Web site and help Google index your press release directly.

4. Syndicate your press release using SEO tag techniques.

Now that you have your press release on your Web site, it's

time to syndicate your press release. There are quite a few good syndication services, some free and some paid. The paid ones, of course, are more effective, but a few of the free ones are good as well.

For free services, consider PRLOG.org, which also has a paid option for about $50 per release. Paid services such as PRWeb cost $199 per release, or there are packages that can get each press release to about $75. In any case, the process of syndication is pretty much the same regardless of which service you use.

Syndication means that blogs, portals, news sites, magazines, and other informational sites pull news releases from these services. By syndicating your release, you can get many thousands of Web sites to carry your release in full or in part with links back to your Web site or to the press release on your service. You can get many direct reads, and for SEO purposes, you can get quite a few links from other sites back to your Web site. Google interprets these links as votes, and over time, these link votes help propel your Web site to the top of Google for relevant keyword searches.

> Take the opportunity to embed your keywords in the URL itself.

Using PRLOG.org as our example, here are the steps to successful syndication. (We'll assume you've signed up for your free account.) Open up your press release in one browser window, and open up your PRLOG.org account in another.

1. Copy/paste your headline from your press release to the headline space on PRLOG.org.

2. Copy/paste your kicker (meta description) from your press release to the summary space on PRLOG.org.

3. Copy/paste the press release body. Adjust the spacing as needed, but be sure to preserve a complete http:// link in the third paragraph. This will become an active link back to your Web site.

4. Choose industries at the bottom that are appropriate. For the free service, you can choose two.

5. For "tags," write similar keyword phrases for your press release. Here, it's useful to go back to your keyword

research and type in phrases similar to those that people search in volume on Google.

Preview your release and when it's acceptable, hit submit. In most cases, your press release will instantly become visible on the Internet.

On paid services such as PRWEB.com, you get a few additional, important options.

First, in the first paragraph of your release, you can highlight your target keyword phrase and make this phrase an active link back to your Web site. This is very valuable for SEO as it creates a keyword heavy link on PRWEB.com to your Web site, and after syndication, it will create quite a few keyword heavy links on other sites. Second, you can tag your release for relevant industries. Use every single one of these and use them wisely.

These "tags" influence what Web sites will pull your content, so think like a newspaper or blog editor and use tags that they are likely to subscribe to. The third step is to use your release city and target cities to identify a range of cities across the United States. If your release is in Los Angeles, for example, also indicate target California cities like Fresno, San Francisco, San Diego, etc. More is definitely better. Finally, you can structure your URL on PRWEB.com to be keyword heavy—so take the opportunity to embed your keywords in the URL itself.

5. Measure your results to learn what works.

After you have syndicated your press release, wait a week or so and then circle back to measure results. Measure your online pickup by going to your release and highlighting the release headline with your mouse, then copy it by hitting CTRL+C or right click, copy. Open up a new browser window and go to Google. Paste your release headline and be sure to enclose it in quotation marks, as in, "New Industrial Fans for Agriculture and Crops Released by Jason's Fan Company."

Hit enter. Google will then find all occurrences of the press release. Look at the top of the Google screen and you'll see a phrase showing the number of results. This number is your "online pickup." Depending on how well you tagged your release, your keywords in your release headline and the general popularity of those words, you can get to the thousands in terms of pickup. A small percent of these will also embed your link back to your Web site, thereby building SEO-friendly links via syndication.

If you use Google Analytics, you can also measure direct referral traffic. Log into your Google Analytics account, and on the far left of the screen, click "Traffic Sources," "Sources," "Referrals." Look for PRLOG.org, PRWEB. com or whatever syndication service you used in this data. Pay attention to other referral sites, as some of these will be additional online pickup of your release.

In terms of the link benefit of press releases, this effect is more difficult to measure. One of the better free online tools is called Open Site Explorer (http://www.opensiteexplorer.org/). Enter your Web site address in this tool, and hit enter. Pay attention to the "Total Links" data. As you generate and syndicate press releases, this number should increase over time. Behind the scenes, this link activity will help your whole Web site perform well on target Google searches. **PRN**

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