

The Perfect Press Release



Helen McCusker shows you how to write the perfect press release

No matter how great your book is, if people don't know about it, it will never sell. The press release is a vital tool in your publicity campaign which helps you tell the world that your new book is available for purchase. It's often emailed or posted to the media with a review copy of the book. An effective press release is written in a journalistic format that mimics how a magazine or newspaper would write about your book.

Remember, you are not targeting a bookshop buyer (that's the job of the Advanced Information sheet, which is usually compiled by your publisher or sales team –if you have one). Because the press

release is such an important part of your media pack and as there is a trend among inexperienced publicists to turn the announcement into an advertisement that journalists will reject, not embrace, it's important to understand how to write a press release that will get read and used. If you missed my recent press release workshop at *The Self Publishing Conference 2013*, then here are ten of my best tips designed to help you avoid common and costly errors.

USE THE TRADITIONAL NEWS RELEASE FORMAT

This includes a headline, release date, your announcement written in a journalistic style, publication details (including ISBN, publisher,

price and stockists), author biography, author website address, author photograph, the book's cover image and your (or your publicist's) contact details. If the book has received any pre-publication praise, include this too.

REMEMBER THAT YOU ARE NOT THE NEWS

Your book is the news. Unless your name is recognisable, don't use it in the headline. 'World War II secrets uncovered' is more compelling than, 'John Brown's first book about World War II.' Although your book is the news, a new book being published is not news –it happens each and every day! Your press release headline needs to be punchy and highlight the book's USP (unique selling

point). Take your ego out of it. Take your natural inclination to sell, sell, sell out of it. Look at your story with a cold, objective eye.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS COUNT

An eye-catching headline is crucial. Remember, the journalist isn't interested in how many books you want to sell; they just want a good story to fill editorial space. Write a dynamic first paragraph that is designed to hook your reader's attention. Space permitting, try to include some brief information about the book or chapter titles.

INSERT QUOTE HERE

Including quotes from a reliable source can be an important addition to your press release. Quotes help to prove credibility, give perspective, can add a 'human touch' to the release and, if the release is used verbatim, that's the quote the journalist will use in their story. Include a good quote from you, a reader, or a supporting expert. However, ensure that the quote is not just self-promotional bumph that turns off a journalist. Make it authentic and interesting, maybe adding more detail to the story in your own words.

KEEP IT SHORT

Organise your thoughts into three or four paragraphs. The entire press release must fit on a single page; otherwise you're likely to lose interest before the book has

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even been opened. This also makes it neat and easy to read when enclosing a copy with each review copy you mail out.

THINK ABOUT THE FORMAT

I've worked as a busy journalist and know for a fact that sometimes attachments get overlooked, so if you are choosing to use email to send out your press release then it's worth including a brief pitch in the body of the email itself, as this may be the only text that is read. Also, consider producing the press release in a format that is widely accessible. Perhaps MSWord, or convert the press release to PDF to produce a snazzy, eye-catching page which is easy to forward on or print. However, remember that clicking on the attachment takes effort and it's easier for a journalist to scan the contents of an email that's already open.

BE CREATIVE

If you're sending the press release by post then why not be creative? I've heard of authors including a chocolate bar with their review copies so that the book reviewer can take some time out to read their book. Last year I used black envelopes when promoting a book on the predicted 'end of the world' to attract the attention of journalists. I think the fact that my author soon after appeared on Sky News and was invited to write for the UK's biggest selling newspaper was no coincidence!

SPELL CHECK

Always check the text several times for typos and grammatical mistakes as these distract the journalist's focus from your story and make you look unprofessional

(especially as an author!). Don't just use a computer spell-checker, it's best to also print it out and read through again. Once you're happy there are no mistakes, ask someone else to check –it's amazing what a second pair of eyes can spot.

HIT SEND!

Distribute your press release with a covering email that briefly highlights the main points and tells the journalist exactly why this book is of interest and how they could feature it. Make life easy for the journalist; the more you make somebody work to use your information, the less likely they are to do so. In addition to distributing your release to your targeted media outlets, post the release on your website so it can be found by search engine users. It's also worth researching appropriate news wire services; there are lots of free services online.

CATCH YOUR COVERAGE

As well as monitoring the media you approach, it's also worth signing up to Google Alerts and perhaps consider subscribing to a press clippings agency. You will most likely miss some of the media coverage –or come across it late – but you should be able to track the 'big' media mentions by monitoring your Amazon sales ranking. It's great when you see the correlation between publicity and sales, it makes all of the hard work worth it. Remember, even if you don't get media coverage first time around, you've brought your name to the attention of the journalists who are important to you to enable you to start forming a positive working relationship.