

45 IDEAS – BEST PRACTICES FOR WRITING PRESS RELEASES

MODERATOR

Pat Trowbridge is Vice President and Group Publisher - Equine & Agrarian Titles for Lumina Media, publisher of *Horse Illustrated*, *Young Rider*, *Hobby Farms* and HorseChannel.com. He began his publishing career in 1996, during his over 19 years; he has held many positions including Advertising Sales Representative, Advertising Sales Manager, Advertising Director for Equine Group Publications, Director of Corporate Special Projects, and Associate Publisher for Trade Titles. Pat grew up riding horses on his family's small farm in Kansas. He resides in Southern California with his family.

PANELISTS

L.A. Pomeroy is a 2016 Syracuse Press Club sports writing award winner and led Equestrian Press support and athlete interviews at the 1996 Olympics. She has since provided publicity consult to an elite stable of clients including Equus Film Festival-NYC and Intercollegiate Horse Shows Association while maintaining a strong editorial voice in today's equestrian lifestyle and sports media. L.A. lives in Northampton, MA, at the 'crossroads of New England' and equidistant from the paddocks of Saratoga, polo fields of Greenwich, and carriage rides of Central Park. Learn more at lapomeroy.com.

Kassi Hoxmeier has worked in equine marketing and public relations since 2008. She is currently a senior content specialist with the leading marketing agency, Bader Rutter, working to support Zoetis, the world's largest animal company. Kassi offers a wealth of equine experience as she was raised on a cow/calf and horse ranch in Iowa and has shown horses since age 10. She is an animal science and journalism alumni of Iowa State University. Kassi enjoys spending free time with her husband and son competing in horse shows with her Appaloosa, Movin the Chains.

Maria C. Grulich is the International Development Director for Experience Kissimmee. She focuses on emerging Tourism Markets for Osceola County; Education, Medical and Eco/Agricultural Tourism as well as assists international

business investors and provides VIP/diplomacy services to visitors from foreign governments. A Cuban American, Maria is multilingual and a graduate of the University of South Florida. She is very involved in the community, sitting on several boards including Valencia College Board of Trustees, Orlando Science Center, Celebration Foundation Advisory Board, and The Osceola Council of Aging Housing Board.

Osceola News Gazette stated: Maria's experience in the business world, coupled with being a single mom of two teenagers gives her an incredible perspective. A true "connector" of people.

Abby Strawder is an experienced public relations practitioner, using strategic planning, problem solving, and issues analysis skills to manage clients' reputations. She works in Kansas City as a senior reputation manager for Sullivan Hidgon & Sink, primarily on behalf of Merial.

Abby grew up on a bison ranch in central Kansas and graduated from Kansas State University, majoring in animal science and ag communications. She is married to Cody and they enjoy spending time with their horses, dogs and fainting goats, and are looking forward to their new role as parents in December!

Johnny Robb, a lifelong equestrian, combines her versatile passion for horses with more than 25 years of hands-on regional, national and international marketing and public relations experience. Johnny earned her BA in Journalism and then worked in advertising agencies and PR firms for 5 years before going in-house with several international firms for more than 15 years. In 2006, she formed her equestrian-focused marketing firm, JRPR and in 2013 launched the equine do-it-yourself PR website, EquineNewsRoom.com.

Some of Johnny's accomplishments include:

- USDF Gold Medalist and competes at the Grand Prix level
- Served on the USDF marketing committee for over 5 years
- Served two years on the Dressage at Devon Board of Directors

1. Respect the journalism pyramid.
2. Identify one idea with three key messages.
 - Prioritize a maximum of three key messages, and write your release around these messages.
3. Answer these questions in first paragraph. That way if anything is cut the basics are there.
 - Who
 - What
 - When
 - Where
 - Why
 - How
4. Ask if the content is best suited for a press release.
5. Start at the beginning - 6 Tips To Make Every Headline a Headliner.
 - The invitation to read your story is your headline so make it readable, interesting, and engaging.
6. Embrace quotes. They breathe life into dry content.
7. Narrow your audience; write to their interest.
 - Ask yourself: "Is this information newsworthy to veterinarians? Horse owners? Horse owners who compete?"
 - Keep in mind; veterinarians prefer more scientific evidence, references and studies. Horse owners want to know what they should do for their horse.
8. Put your name, e-mail and day time phone number (cell etc....) at the top of your release. They may need to get a hold of you for clarification or may want to do a bigger story.
9. Tell a story.
10. Less is more. Think of a headline as a billboard people are cruising by in a fast sports car. Keep it as short and sweet as possible. If you feel you desperately need to tell them more, resist the temptation to have a long

headline and use your opening sentence to get a bit windy and tell all. If you have to go long and wordy try a sub-headline...a sneaky way to trick the reader into staying for the duration (of the headline at least).

11. Turnaround time is everything.

12. Provide credibility.

- Identify 1-2 experts to help support details shared in the release. Credible sources include company representatives and outside experts to validate statements.
- Answer the question: "How do I know?"
- Releases come from a company, so for best pick-up, you must provide editors with why the information can be trusted.

13. When providing photo, state name of who took photo and what it is of. If a photo is included, state at the top of the press release that photo is attached.

14. Include a key take away.

15. Don't tell your entire story in the headline. It should make people curious enough to read the article. Think TMI (too much information) and cut it to bare bones.

16. Write expecting to be edited from the bottom up.

17. Avoid sentence sprawl.

- Focus on one idea per sentence. Long introductory clauses become hurdles for the reader.
- Read work aloud; if you need to take a breath, the sentence might be too long.

18. At end of release put ### this means that is the end of your release.

19. Write in third person whenever possible.

20. Avoid asking a question in a headline if possible. First of all, you give up all authority by asking a question instead of being the all mighty and knowing wizard-of-headlines by writing an interesting statement. And

most of time a glancing reader will give the answer you don't desire and move on.

21. Help your client create a boilerplate, mission statement, and keywords to use consistently.
22. Conclude with a Clear Call to Action
 - Be as specific as you can about the call to action
 - At the very least, send readers to a website or social media page where they can find more information.
23. Know the deadline of the particular periodical you are targeting
24. Digitally optimize the release.
25. Avoid complex names and eye stopping words in your headlines. No one wants to work hard.
26. Write for social media: Minimal characters, keystrokes, spaces.
27. Include additional resources.
 - Link to videos, websites or other resources that help support key messages from the release. This gives editors more options for promotion.
28. Read various periodicals so you get to know what each writer is looking for.
29. Pretend like you're a reporter.
30. Include money, celebrity names, exciting tidbits in your headline. Shallow, tacky, and effective – blame it on reality TV, but readers are drawn to the cheap thrill.
31. Never dumb it down.
32. Eliminate sprawling releases.
 - Focus on your one idea. Use additional ideas in a separate release for later distribution or as a follow-up pitch to editors.
 - Two pages is an approximate maximum length.

33. Look for more than one opportunity to do a release (examples ground breaking, then ribbon cutting, 6 month anniversary). Does the location have interesting history? What about the owner. Who is the customer? If doing an article to appeal to another culture- know some of the protocols before writing.
34. Avoid corporate speak or buzzwords.
35. Keep the demographic of the reader in mind when writing. A 14 year-old-pony hunter rider has very different reading habits then a 55-year-old dressage rider. So how do you please them all...use the old Black Beauty method. Both those demographics love horses and that is common denominator. Keep the demographic in mind and bridge any gaps in your writing by focusing on the passion for horses they undoubtedly share.
36. Always have the client vet out a draft. Or two.
37. Outline a distribution plan.
 - Don't overwhelm editors with multiple releases per day or even week.
 - Consider developing an annual distribution calendar for your media outreach.
 - Be sure to include release information on your social channels.
38. Do not forget publications in other languages for placement (Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese).
39. Proof, proof again, and have someone else proof, too.
40. It's also about the money! Most magazine and web sites print content to attract readers and advertisers. It is simple economics. If your press release can be useful in filling the publication with quality content and possibly help attract advertisers –that's a win win. No press release should be an ad for a person or products. It's a story. But if the facts in your story can help the publication's advertising reps attract new advertisers it is going to have added value to the publisher.
41. Create an editorial calendar to stay focused on key points and goals.

42. Plan to follow up.

- Ensure your email subject line is compelling.
- Editors are busy. Make sure you graciously follow up with them.
- Be prepared to line up an interview with a subject matter expert or provide high-resolution images.
- Understand each publication's needs, so you can follow up to give them exactly what they'll want in order to use the information in their publication.

43. Become a source for good reliable story ideas.

44. Include data whenever possible.

45. Whenever possible write for the good of the sport. Every press release our firm writes has the underlying goal of promoting horse sport. We write press releases to promote riders, brands, events, and horse sports. We are not news hounds. We are not investigative reporters. We look for the good in our stories and hope reading what we write will attract new people to horse sport while validating those who are already involved. Growth and longevity of sport and the media outlets within the sport is part of the long term plan.

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For information about American Horse Publications, visit www.americanhorsepubs.org or contact Chris Brune at ahorsepubs@aol.com