

Top PR Tips



2024 Awards press launch photo.

Whether your business is just starting out or firmly established, you can benefit from entering the right business award. The public relations (PR) opportunities that come with making an awards shortlist, or a win, mean your business will be in the spotlight for all the right reasons. Industry awards can generate significant publicity across local and national press and social media, and with the award process running across several months, you've a constant source of material to generate content, and traffic, for your website and social pages.

PR can be a great way to generate publicity for your company, product or launch and can be a cost-effective way to tell your story.



**North East Scotland
Food & Drink Awards**
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Make sure your story is newsworthy: Before you even attempt to write a press release, think about the things you like to read, watch and listen to in the media. It's worth asking yourself these questions:

1. Is there anything "new" in my story?
2. Is there anything unusual or unexpected about it?
3. Would this be of interest to anyone outside my business?
4. Will anyone actually care?

You might be excited about your new marketing director or the launch of your new product, but will anyone else be interested? If the answer is no, hold off on that press release until you've got a better story.

Write killer headlines: Most journalists get hundreds of emails every day, so it's a good idea to include "press release" or "story idea" in the subject line. A great subject line is also a must.

Don't try to be clever: If journalists don't immediately understand what your story is about, they'll move on to the next thing in their inbox.

Get your 'top line' over in the first line: Your first line should be a summary of the story in no more than around 15-20 words; it should read like the opening of a news story. Get to the point quickly.

Journalists are generally taught to get as many of the five Ws (who, what, where, why and when) in the opening line of news stories. If you want examples of great first lines, look no further than your daily newspaper.

Another trick is to imagine your story is going to be covered on a TV or radio programme.

A presenter has around 5-6 seconds to introduce an item e.g. "And coming up next ... why a local cafe owner is giving a free coffee this weekend to anyone born in July." If your story was going to be featured on the radio today, how would the presenter introduce it?

Use quotes to provide insight, not information: Including quotes from people in your company can be helpful for journalists. Quotes should be used to provide insight and opinion and sound like a real person said them.

Be clear and concise: Make sure you use language that is plain, simple and confident. The optimum length of a press release is one to two pages of A4 - that's just three or four short paragraphs and a couple of quotes. If it's longer than that, you've probably got unnecessary waffle that doesn't add anything to your story.

Don't be tempted to include background information about your company. This, along with any other additional information, can be included in a "notes to editors" section at the end. It's fine to run over to a second page for notes.

Sub-headings and bullet points can be useful to make information easy to digest, particularly if you're including figures or statistics.

Write in third person: Ensure that you write your press release in the third person throughout, except when you are directly quoting someone.

Sentence structure: Avoid using long complicated sentences; keep sentences short and snappy. Likewise, ensure regular paragraph breaks and try not to exceed two

or three sentences per paragraph.

Leave out the jargon: Always assume that the reader knows nothing about you, your company, your products or your event. You probably have specialist knowledge about the work or business sector and use language to describe it that may be hard for new audiences or journalists to understand. It is always a good idea to get someone who does not know the work to read your press release and check for any jargon.

Financial information: If your press release is about the launch of a new product or expansion/growth of your company, be prepared to be asked for financial information. It is understandable that you may not wish to give away any 'company secrets' but be expected to at least be asked what your turnover is. If you are involved in export markets, you will most likely be asked to reveal what percentage of your turnover/sales can be attributed to export.

Customise it: If you want to maximise your chances of getting coverage, you will have to tweak your release for different publications according to their readership.

Keep it upbeat: Make sure to keep your press release upbeat and interesting. If you are writing about an event, be sure to highlight the fun, exciting or human factor, not just that you have an event on. It may be that the event is the 'first of its kind' or that you have a local celebrity performing or that it has a family focus. Most of all try to take a creative story angle.

Format it:

- Create a header and footer - always add the words 'PRESS RELEASE' at the very top of your release and include

your company logo to make it easily identifiable

- Use a clear typeface/font and point size (12pt minimum) and double-space your text
- Don't underline text
- Restrict the use of capital letters to the headline and surnames, geographic areas etc. Job titles should be in lower case.
- Date your press release
- Always type 'ENDS' to make it clear to the journalist that this is where the story ends
- Further Information e.g. background, contact details etc can be added after 'ENDS'

Check it: Once you feel that your press release is complete, make sure to reread it, checking your facts, your spelling and that you have answered the 5 Ws.

Picture it: A compelling image can often be the deciding factor whether a publication runs your story. It helps your story stand out from the crowd and gives a visual reference for your whole story to hang off.

- Include a photo caption
- Use a clear professional image - close-ups are better
- Animals or children are often popular with the picture desk
- Be creative to get a really visual, colourful photo – think of getting a professional in
- Supply both landscape and portrait images, if possible
- Avoid sending big files that will clog up inboxes

Send it: It's a good idea to include a short outline of your idea and where you think it might fit in the publication you're pitching to, in your covering email. Do your research by looking up previous articles the journalist has written to understand their brief. Paste your press release underneath, as a journalist may not bother to open an attachment.

Finally: Aim high but be realistic in your expectations. It may take a few attempts and a bit of chasing to gain coverage for your business. Don't give up; determination and a willingness to learn can take you a very long way.

Follow it up: Follow it up with a polite call. Not only will this help you to start a relationship with your press contact, but it will also give you a chance to ask if they need any additional information.

Take the time to ask the journalist what topics or area they cover. They might be able to recommend another contact who is more likely to be interested in your industry.

To maintain your relationship with your local journalist, be sure to regularly invite them to your events/functions. If you launch a new product, send them samples. If you are organising a paid-for event, invite them as a guest and give them complementary passes. Remember it is a two-way relationship. The media can help your business but generating regular coverage in local papers, trade press or national media takes time. The benefits to your business when your press releases are successful will be worth it.

For more information on entering the North East Scotland Food & Drink Awards

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