A Guide To Issuing News Releases

Writing a news release isn't much different from writing a news article. The following points (some tongue-in-cheek) will help ensure a professional and newsworthy document:

1) **Identify your issue**. Is a company polluting your community? Has a MLA or candidate made an outlandish statement? Identify what it is you want to bring to the media's attention.

2) **Find your hook**. A hook can be tricky – **dog-bites-man** is not going to make the six o'clock news, but **dog-bites-man-because-GMOs-in-dog-food-are-making-pets-crazy** will. How about something a little less silly: **clear-cutting of trees in BC continues unabated**: this is tragic, but there is no hook. Always remember that journalists are inundated with news releases, so the easier you make their jobs the better chance you have of your issue being picked up. Here's an example that makes reporters salivate: **MLA for [BC riding] reneges on campaign promise to end clear-cutting; voters are furious**.

3) You now have an issue and a hook – it's **time to start writing**. Style your release upon the following specifications; please note font style, length and size (*very* important).

4) A news release is not a Media Advisory (see How to promote your events for free). An advisory is used to inform the media of an event, news conference, photo opportunity, et cetera. It is followed up at the event with a News Release. If you put the news into your Media Advisory, don't be surprised if you have a sparsely attended event.

5) **Source material**. This may seem obvious, but just a reminder to never use information that is of a dubious nature. Personal Web sites are generally a big no-no, and be suspicious of anything originating from a special interest group. Reliable media sources (example: Globe & Mail, Reuters, Canadian Press, National Public Radio, CBC) are generally acceptable. Government reports/studies are gold, Statistics Canada too, as well as anything found through the Access to Information Act.

6) **Sending it**. Build a comprehensive media email list for disseminating releases that is relevant to the issue, but don't inundate journalists with news releases.

7) **Still unclear on how to write a news release?** Don't worry; it can be tricky at first. The best thing to do if you still doubt yourself is to style your release after the example below.

Headline

Paragraph 1: (DATE, PLACE) – This is your **lead**. It's one sentence containing the idea and hook, attributed to a source and NO QUOTATION MARKS.

This is the most important paragraph and needs to wrap-up the whole issue in **one** tight sentence.

Paragraph 2: **A quote**. This must segue from the lead. "What we're seeing in the Clayoquot Sound further demonstrates that...," said John Doe. Make sure it's appropriate, within character and is not over-the-top.

Paragraph 3: **Nuts and bolts**. This is the meat of the release. This is the paragraph where you want to include facts, data, evidence, etc…Example: A study by Environment Canada shows that more trees were cut down during XXX governments that any other government in history. Environmentalists with the Suzuki Foundation and Sierra Club have joined forces in denouncing this grave injustice, etc…

NOTE: if your claims cannot be backed up by hard data – documents, clippings, research – don't issue a release. There is little that's worse for credibility than having to retract a release. Do not use a variety of sources for support, stick with one at best or two.

Paragraph 4: **Repeat**. What was it that Kevin Spacey said in *Seven*? To get people to notice anything these days, you can't just tap them on the shoulder – you have to hit them with a sledgehammer. Once you reach this point in the release, use your best judgment in trying to drive the point home. This could be another quote, more factual/statistical data, etc…

Paragraph 5: **Wrap it up**. Some classic wrap-up options include: positive information or juxtaposing your ideas with the issue in question.

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(****Ever wondered what this "**30**" means? It's an archaic code that journalists still use to signify that a text has ended, and that there is no more information beyond this point*.)

For more information:
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Name of organization (if applicable)
Telephone number
Email address

 <u>**VERY**</u> **IMPORTANT**: **your release, from start to finish, should not exceed ONE PAGE.**

MEDIA TIPS

The following are a few helpful hints.

News releases

1. Headlines should be 5 to 7 words and 50 to 68 characters in length maximum (including spaces).

2. Your lead should be a maximum of 25 words

3. The release should be 200 to 300 words maximum and fit on one page

4. Your release must include:

   a. A date
   b. A place
   c. A contact name and telephone number, double check the number

5. Use one or two syllable words whenever possible

6. Statistics and facts -- from reputable sources -- adds weight to a release, just because you believe something to be true doesn't make it true. Always have reputable references and sources

7. When incorporating quotes from a spokesperson use "says" or "said," not exclaim, argue or scream

8. Check for style, formatting and typos

9. Avoid acronyms, unless obvious -- RCMP, CSIS

10. To learn more, purchase the Canadian Press Style Book from CP

GOOD LUCK!