



AMTIL – GUIDELINES ON PRODUCING PRESS RELEASES

To complement the AMTIL Press Centre, AMTIL has compiled the following guidelines for its members on creating editorial material such as press releases about their products, services and other activities. While some AMTIL members are already highly active and effective in this area, others have expressed concern about not really knowing how to go about it. These guidelines are intended to provide a basic grounding in what a press release is and how to put one together – either for inclusion on the AMTIL Press Centre or for distribution to your own contacts. However, if you want a little extra help, AMTIL can recommend a number of public relations specialists who can assist you. Email us [here](#) for details.

WHAT IS A PRESS RELEASE?

A press release is a piece of written communication that a company or other organisation releases to media outlets to announce something newsworthy to a certain audience. This might be details of a new product, service or initiative; a notable development such as a change in personnel, structure or strategy; or anything else that might be of interest – perhaps a landmark anniversary for the organisation, or a recent awards win.

Media outlets will receive numerous press releases every day – those releases that it regards as relevant to its audience may be rewritten, edited and cut or extended to form the basis for the articles that it publishes. Many articles may quite simply be press releases with very little about them changed at all.

Beyond the most basic press release, there are other sorts of editorial material that your organisation can put out in the media: case studies showing your products or services being utilised by real-world clients (and showcasing the benefits); or technical articles and opinion pieces (which strengthen your brand by presenting you as an authoritative “thought leader” within your industry). But fundamentally, these all serve the same purpose as a standard press release – building your brand by leveraging media coverage of your organisation.

There are various advantages to producing press releases and other editorial material, but one of the main ones has to be cost. Placing an advert in a publication will always have a price-tag – both for the ad space, and for designing the ad itself. But producing a press release can amount to as little as typing up two or three hundred words, maybe taking a photo or two, and emailing it to some media outlets.

On top of this, when a press release gets published as an article in a magazine or on a website, it acquires a perceived objectivity and authenticity on the basis that that outlet approved it to appear as editorial. Most people know to regard an advert with some scepticism, but we tend (rightly or wrongly) to assign more credibility to things we read as articles. Ultimately, the best strategy is a mix of advertising and PR. There’s a reason why the most successful companies advertise, and there’s a reason why the most successful companies put out press releases.

Also, importantly, a press release gives you more control over the message than if a journalist were to interview you and write a story that emphasises the information he/she thinks is of most interest. It should be added that journalists do occasionally misquote interview subjects and get their facts wrong, but that’s less likely if you’ve given them the facts in writing.

At AMTIL we often hear from companies who say they wouldn't know how to go about it, or they don't have the time. Hopefully these guidelines will help with the first issue. Finding time is the trickier part, but there are things you can do to make finding those two or three hundred words seem a little less daunting (and a press release doesn't strictly have to be 200 words, or even 100). When you're putting those words together, think about where you might already have something written up. Is there marketing material you can copy a few lines from? Do you have specification sheets that you can draw details from? You might even have sent colleagues or clients emails about your latest product; those emails could be packed with phrases and sentences ready for copy-pasting – so check your Sent items.

GETTING PAST THE GATEKEEPER

One last point to keep in mind. Creating an effective press release is – in part at least – about making things as easy as possible for the media outlets where you want to get exposure. Think of the staff at these outlets as the gatekeepers. They decide whether your story gets put in front of their readers, or just goes straight into the Deleted Items folder. So you help your own case by denying them any excuse to hit Delete.

Editors and journalists generally want to publish the material of the most relevance and greatest interest to their readers, but like just about everyone, they're often short on time and resources. In an ideal world they might love to write all their articles from scratch, but in the real world that's simply not possible. However, if you can package up all the information for a story, in an accessible, comprehensible way with a couple of decent pictures, you've done a fair bit of their job for them.

Let's say your company "YourCompany Pty Ltd" has released a new version of its GlowGreen range of high-vis workwear, now equipped with Bluetooth connectivity. Maybe you could find a journalist with a passion for uncovering exclusive stories about safety gear that no-one else is telling. It's more likely, though, that he or she will have other stories that take priority, or indeed the outlet he/she works for has other priorities. But that doesn't mean that there's no place for stories about high-vis workwear, or a genuine appetite for them among readers, but it might come down to you having to help tell that story yourself.

They'll still edit the material and rewrite it to some extent, so don't worry about trying to write a gleaming piece of immaculately eloquent prose. Just by providing the facts in a clear, concise format, you'll be giving that news outlet a solid basis for an article while saving them time and effort.

And when a media outlet has got a deadline looming and a half-page to fill, your workwear story might be sitting in a folder with a story about safety goggles and a story about protective earmuffs. They're all equally relevant to the reader, but the goggles story doesn't have pictures, and the earmuffs one has been translated badly by Google; your story is well written with two good, high-resolution images. Which one is more likely to get published?

STRUCTURING YOUR PRESS RELEASE

A good format for a standard press release would be structured along the following lines: title; introduction; body text; boilerplate (or "about"); and contact details.

TITLE

The title of your press release is the first opportunity to hook in your audience – which in the first instance is the outlet where you want it published. Think of it as like the subject line of an important email: when it's sitting in someone's inbox, you want the recipient to be able to get a good idea what it's about without having to open it. So try to keep it as clear and unambiguous as possible, using the least possible words. Don't make it

overlong (more than 15 words is excessive), and don't try to come up with something arty and mysterious (the outlet will decide if they want to do that).

So in the case of your GlowGreen high-vis line, you might go with something like:

YourCompany adds Bluetooth for next-gen GlowGreen high-vis workwear range

INTRODUCTION

This is essentially the first paragraph of your story, and should basically detail the key facts you're trying to convey. It should read like a breaking news story, getting straight to the point. As with the title, keep it short and simple – one or two sentences is usually enough.

For example:

YourCompany Pty Ltd on 1 February released the latest update of its popular GlowGreen line of high-vis workwear, available throughout Australia and New Zealand. The new range comes equipped with Bluetooth connectivity as standard, enabling full Industry 4.0 integration.

BODY TEXT

This is where you flesh out the details of the story you're trying to tell. The first paragraph of the body text might follow up on points made in the introduction and give some further explanation. So for example, how popular was the GlowGreen line, and what was it that made it so popular? And why is Industry 4.0 integration a desirable feature for safety workwear?

The next few paragraphs might also include things like detailed specifications, supporting statistics, background information, or other relevant details. So for GlowGreen, you might add that along with Bluetooth it includes wireless charging. You might provide data that shows how Bluetooth-connected workwear has delivered clear gains in workplace safety. You might want to discuss how the new product line is part of a new strategy by YourCompany to crack the wearable devices market. You might have anecdotes from the history of the GlowGreen range – maybe it has been the chosen brand for a motorsport team or something.

The other thing you can include in the Body Text is quotations, where a spokesperson from your company (such as your CEO or a senior manager) can make a comment on whatever it is you're announcing. This can be a nice way to break up a press release that might otherwise be quite dry and technical by introducing a human voice.

YourCompany CEO John Smith said: "We're thrilled to finally be able to offer the latest version of our GlowGreen range to our customers. With the introduction of Bluetooth functionality, it truly is the best value on the market."

Quotes also let you "blow your own trumpet" and be more emphatic about the positives of what you're doing. The main text of your press release is essentially you trying to put words in the mouth of a media outlet, so those words should largely be objective and factual in tone, but quotes let you speak more freely. It's fine, for example, to say a product is "the best on the market" as the quoted opinion of an identified spokesperson, but making the same claim in the main text comes across as a statement of fact, and media outlets will be reluctant to uncritically endorse that statement by publishing it in their own name. Moreover, they're unlikely to drop everything and conduct an objective comparison of rival products in order to fact-check your claim. It's more likely they'll just fix any problems, either by watering excessive claims down (such as by inserting phrases like "According to YourCompany..."), or simply deleting them. And if a press release comes too riddled with

hype, they may well give up and have another look at any other stories they've got on file. So keep to the facts in the main text, save the "hard sell" for the quotes.

Another thing to be careful of is the distinction between first-person and third-person. It's fine to use first-person words such as "we", "us" and "our" in quotes, but elsewhere in the press release it should always be third-person ("YourCompany has...", "its products are..."). A common mistake, for example, is for a company to lift copy from its website and forget to change "we" to the company name. If a media outlet decides it wants to publish your story they will fix these problems too. But again, if it's riddled with mistakes, the outlet might have second thoughts and look at alternative material. As mentioned in the previous section, getting past the gatekeeper is key, and you help your chances by leaving less for them to fix. So double-check anything you send out.

Finally, try not to overuse quotes. A press release where too much of the text is enclosed in quote marks can seem like a transcribed speech rather than a news story. At least two paragraphs of regular text to every one of quotation is probably a good rule of thumb.

BOILERPLATE

This is often just headed "ABOUT" on many press releases and is simply a brief outline about your business, what it does, where it operates and so on. It's called boilerplate because it's a standard piece of text that wouldn't really change from one press release to the next. So come up with something that suits your business and stick with it. Two or three sentences are normally enough.

CONTACT DETAILS

The contact details you supply are above all for the media outlet to contact you if they need anything else that's not included in the original press release. They might have follow-up questions, for example, or they might need extra pictures. So the point of contact should be someone who will be able to field any enquiries quickly. Include that person's email address and phone number, as well as the main URL for your website.

If you want the actual published story to include specific contact details, include them in the Body Text, though bear in mind that some outlets may be reluctant to include extensive contact details as it is considered to be too "sales-y". AMT Magazine generally just includes the company's website address. If you want a specific web-page cited in the story, make sure the URL is as short as possible, or consider using a URL-shortening service.

WHAT FORMAT TO USE

It's likely you'll draft your press release in Word, and it's fine to send press releases out as .doc or .docx files. Creating a letterhead-style template that includes your company logo will give it a professional, official look.

Alternatively, many companies send their press releases as .pdf files. This has the advantage that the material can be much harder to change in pdf form, though it can make it harder to extract the text by copy-pasting, depending on how you save the file.

An alternative approach is sometimes to distribute a pdf that cannot be edited in any way, along with a .txt file, which contains the text of the press release in a completely stripped-down, unformatted way, making it very easy to copy-paste.

Online PR resources (including the AMTIL Press Centre) will usually require you to input your text via an online form. They may also offer the option to upload the press release as a document in various file types, as well as uploading pictures, logos and other supporting materials.

WHAT ELSE TO INCLUDE

PICTURES

A picture is worth a thousand words – for media outlets they not only offer some visual stimulus to brighten up a page of text, but can also fill space in a print layout in a way that's much more flexible than just adding extra words and sentences. So try to include any images you can to accompany your story: product shots, portraits of personnel named in the story, or even just shots of the front of your building can all be useful.

High-resolution photos are preferred – a resolution of 300dpi is recommended though you can sometimes get by with 96dpi (you check the resolution by right-clicking on the picture file and selecting Properties). It's advisable to remove any metadata as well (again, open up Properties, select the Details tab, and click Remove Properties and Personal Information).

If you're sending large files, it may be easier to set up a shared folder online using services such as DropBox or Hightail. Some outlets will have size limits on email attachments, and may not accept .zip files at all.

LOGOS

Logos can be a useful thing to include. Many outlets would probably not include the logo with the story, particularly print media. However, some online channels may use logos with their index pages, as will online PR registries.

OTHER MATERIAL

There are all kinds of other materials you can send with your press release: brochures, product specification sheets, video clips, and so on. However, it's probably advisable not to inundate media outlets with too much stuff in the first instance – better to wait for them to follow up and then discuss what else they might find useful.

DISTRIBUTION

Once you've produced your press release, the question is: how do you get it out to media outlets? The first port of call (as an AMTIL member) is to get straight onto the AMTIL Press Centre and load it up.

After that, it gets trickier. Building a list of media contacts can take a bit of work, but once you've built that list, the hard part is over, and it's then just a case of refining and updating. So think about which media outlets would find your story relevant. Most of them will have a contact link on their homepage. Some may also have a section devoted to how you can submit contributions, or details on how to contact the editor, particular editorial departments or specific journalists. Keep all that information on record – in your CRM, or even just a spreadsheet – so that each time you issue another press release you've got those email addresses ready to go.

Then keep the list updated. If you see a news story at a publication you hadn't previously been aware of, find a contact there and add it to your list. If you just had an "info@" address for a particular outlet, but you're contacted by a specific journalist from that outlet, add his or her details to your list. Building good relationships can really help.

There are also various services available online to help you distribute your contact to a large global database of media contacts, such as Medianet or PR Newswire. Of course these services come at a price, so shop around and get advice from peers who have used them.

A FEW “DO’S AND DON’TS”

- **DO copy from the professionals.** Most big corporates will have a Newsroom/Press Centre/Media Centre on their website where their press releases are compiled. It’s worth checking them out to get an idea how the big guns go about it and borrowing their ideas.
- **DON’T brag.** It can’t be stressed enough that there is nothing to be gained by making excessive claims about the greatness of the product, service or initiative you’re trying to publicise. Media outlets will be reluctant to publish it, and if they do, readers will regard it with scepticism. Try and think of your press release as if it were an article about another company: how does it read? Does it seem credible?
- **DO include all the information you have.** Don’t hold back when it comes to throwing in as much factual information as you can. The outlet publishing your story might cut some of it out, but the more you can give them to work with, the more they can make from it. It could be the difference between a quarter-page of coverage, or a full page.
- **DON’T micromanage.** Media outlets will rewrite material you provide – at the very least they’ll edit it to their own house style. They may change aspects of the story you thought were important; they may only use 300 words when you supplied 800. But provided they don’t change the fundamental facts, try not to get upset about this. The outlet’s priority is its readers, not its contributors. It’s also not advisable to ask to see edited copy or page layouts prior to publication – some outlets may oblige, but it’ll be one more hassle for them at a time when they may well be close to deadlines, meaning they may be more reluctant to run your material in future. If you want total control of the material, perhaps consider booking an advert.
- **DO explain.** Try to make your material accessible for the layperson – explain technical terms and jargon, spell out abbreviations. This is as much to help editors or journalists as the eventual reader. Obviously there’s a degree of common sense to this: we all know kg are kilograms and cm are centimetres. But it’s worth thinking about whether someone you know from outside the industry would understand what you’re saying.
- **DON’T overwrite.** Don’t get bogged down trying to make your press release read like a broadsheet columnist or a prize-winning novel. Keep sentences simple, and break things up into short paragraphs. If an editor decides to rewrite your material so it’s a bit more “fancy” that’s fine, but generally editors find it more of a chore to tone down over-elaborate copy than to polish up something more basic. So don’t be shy about submitting something that’s largely a list of bullet points. And don’t waste time trying to come up with a zinger of a headline.
- **DON’T CAPITALISE BRAND NAMES.** Some organisations – even professional PR agencies – think it’s a great idea to put every mention of the COMPANY and its PRODUCTS in CAPITAL LETTERS. This is a bafflingly weird habit. Of course certain brands are all caps – BMW, CSIRO, IBM – but for brands that are not, it really just comes across as a bit shouty and overexcitable. More importantly, most outlets won’t publish it like that, meaning an editor would have to trudge through it and de-capitalise every single mention. Yes, they’ll go to the trouble if the story is worth publishing, but it might make them less inclined to look at your press release first next time you send one out.
- **DO keep looking for opportunities, but don’t overdo it.** There are countless things that you could turn into press releases, so keep alert to any opportunities that arise. Think about the sorts of stories you see in magazines or online about organisations like yours; could you be putting out similar stories? But once you’ve got into the habit, be careful not to bombard the media with too much. While some companies never issue press releases, others seem to put one out every few minutes, for things so trivial they might as well announce their stationery orders. That sort of overload can have

the effect of devaluing your material, encouraging outlets to regard you as spam rather than as a reliable provider of newsworthy stuff. So try to strike a balance.

- **DO check your work.** Everyone makes typos or spelling mistakes, but it's still important to read through the material you're sending out, especially if you've pasted a lot of material from various sources. Get someone else to look it over too – a second pair of eyes always helps.
- **DON'T BE DETERRED.** It's never guaranteed that a press release will generate media coverage. Don't be deterred if your first one doesn't go straight onto the front page of a national paper, or even page 59 of a trade mag. It's a persistence game – the first one might not make it, but the next one might. Or indeed, the first one might be kept on file and used weeks or even months after you sent it. And if you keep up a steady flow of material, you will at the very least start to establish yourself as a presence for the editors and journalists at the media outlets you're targeting, so when they do write an article or run a feature on an area where you are a specialist, that's when they may think of you. So keep it up.