

## OP-ED Be smart with your press release

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It is hard to ignore how technology is altering perceptions about PR. A friend of mine, the president of a wholesale insurance brokerage firm, asked me to help him with a press release. He took a stab at his own personnel announcement. I received it formatted for a newswire, right down to the verbiage at the top, dateline, etc. It seemed as if it had already been distributed via the wire.

I was wrong. He simply followed the format from someone else's release. In addition, his company was not mentioned in the headline or the lead, and it included very little messaging about his firm. Most notably, the release concluded with sales contacts. When I expressed the lack of news value, he said, "I don't care about getting coverage or new business. I just want information out there about my firm." Furthermore, he wrote a quote stating, "XYZ firm is an important player..." I asked him to back that up. His response was "It's just a quote." Very troubling.

The proliferation of Internet search engines and advanced mobile technology has created an evolving PR environment. Internet news aggregators offer wire releases to the general public. Press releases distributed via paid wire services are for mass consumption with no middleman to filter the information. Search engine news alerts or RSS feeds allow

press releases to be received via e-mail or smart phones. Company news now goes direct to consumers, which has its pros and cons.

The good news is your information is guaranteed to reach those following your space. By mentioning your stock ticker symbol in your release, you will reach anyone who does a keyword search for any news about your company or industry. In addition, you can tailor your wire releases to drive traf-

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fic directly to content on your site or to pivot off industry trends or news. In the service industry, a press release can lead to direct new-business opportunities.

Unfortunately, many who are not communicators now view wire releases as a mechanism to disseminate random information about their company. Why is this bad? If this trend of blasting non-strategic information out to the general public continues, the press release will no longer be a source of useful information. People, especially

journalists, will begin to view a press release as frivolous information and ignore it.

PR pros must consider this a wake-up call. We must enforce strategic messaging with our clients and stakeholders. We must utilize our expertise and educate non-communicators about the importance of company messaging and branding. We need to remind them of how much information is already out there and only smart communications strategies will help them cut through the clutter.

We can protect our industry by proactively informing clients about communications strategy. Don't let the president of your company say it's an "important player" without explaining what makes it so. Don't allow your client to only list salespeople at the end of your release. Tell them to save that for their advertising. And above all, don't allow anyone to distribute a press release without a goal or perceived end result.

Luckily, my friend was smart enough to allow me to make the necessary edits to his press release and to say something smart in it. So whose communication strategy will you save? ■

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