

## How to Write a Press Release

### (The Basics and Best Practices for the Most Important Part of Your Marketing Plan)

by T. Hampton Dohrman and Joran Slane Oppelt

It happens to us all. You are suddenly struck with the most brilliant idea for a project or event, so you spend months (sometimes years) developing and planning. Everyone calls you a genius. You hand out flyers, tell all your friends, you set up a Facebook event, your friends tell their friends. But the media (print, blogs, radio, TV) show you no attention.

Why aren't they talking about you? Why don't they support community efforts like yours?

Well, my friend, they do. All the time. In fact, they're constantly seeking out new stories and content to feature. The hard truth is that (unless you've pissed someone off) chances are, they don't even know you exist.

Learning to write a good press release (and get it to the correct person) is one of the most important things you can do to promote your exhibit, concert, event, human interest story or anything else you want the media to cover.

Newsroom staff are generally very busy so it's important to do much of the work for them. If they can grab a blurb directly from your release and you've already attached a nice, high-quality photo then you've got a better chance of getting covered. And increasing your odds and staying top-of-mind is half the battle. The other half is actually creating quality work.

## 1. Writing the Press Release

### Letterhead

At the top, include information about who is sending the release. Use your organization letterhead if possible - If you don't have letterhead, make some up.

### Header

Including 1) the text "FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE," 2) Date of the release and 3) Contact Information (e-mail and phone number). If you don't have a professional email address then get one.

FirstInitial.LastName@gmail.com or something similar is fine. If you've got a website, make one like press@yourwebsite.com. Whatever you do, don't use your BigSexyMamma@hotmail.com account.

### Website

Get a website for the project, even if it just has one image (maybe the poster?) on it. Facebook doesn't count. If you don't know how to make a website, ask a friend for help - or better yet, work out a deal with (read: pay) one of the really talented web designers we have in the area. They are guaranteed to have a lot of friends who might also be interested in supporting your project. Or, better still, learn how to do it yourself. The basics of HTML are not that difficult and once you have the skills, you'd be surprised how handy they are, not to mention how they will change the way you perceive most websites. Many free hosting solutions are available (DreamHost and Wordpress are two examples).

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## Date of event

Don't forget to include this information. Just don't.

## Headline

This is a modified version of your subject line (or vice versa), and can also be adapted when Tweeting or texting. Keep it around 160 characters.

## Description

A one-sentence, exciting narrative about the project - If you can't summarize your concept or event in one sentence then you may need to revisit your concept - it may be too complicated. This also your "elevator pitch." Pretend you have a potential investor or sponsor's ear for 30 seconds. What would you say?

## First Paragraph

Begin with the location "Tampa, FL – " or wherever the project takes place. The First paragraph should contain all of the most important information: Who, what, when, where, why should I care? Date, time, location, what is it, how much does it cost, etc.

## Second Paragraph

This is your sell paragraph, like your pitch about why this thing you are doing is awesome. It should be written as if you were writing it directly for publication in print – Media people are very busy and if the second paragraph is well written (and relatively objective) they will often grab it word for word. This is an example of how you can make their job easier and therefore increase the likelihood that it will get picked up.

## Other paragraphs

Highlight what is interesting. You can even say, "Highlights include:" and provide a bulleted list. A bulleted list is great for on-air personalities (anchors, DJs) who read press releases at a glance and prefer information distilled into easily readable bites. For this reason, don't use too many big words in this section. This is also a good place to use press or critical quotes, "What people are saying about BLANK:"

## Last Paragraph

Include some form of the language, "If you have questions, please contact *Your Name* at *your@email.com* or *(your) phone-number*." This is for the media, if they need more information or possibly additional photography, but also for people with questions about the event or project. Once you put your phone number in print you will get people calling you with really weird questions – this is unavoidable. Change your voicemail greeting to something semi-professional and short.

## Fonts

Although it might not look as fancy, you should use one of the standard 'web-safe' fonts in your release. Web-safe fonts are standard on all computers, so using them ensures that the documents will look the same no matter who opens them. You can google for a complete list of Web-safe fonts but some standard favorites include Arial, Helvetica, and Verdana.

The total length of your press release should be one page if possible, but certainly no more than two.

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## 2. Email Procedures

### Include the words 'PRESS RELEASE' in the Subject Line

#### Attach and Paste

Sometimes companies will not let their employees download attachments in their work email for security reasons, or attachments get omitted when replying/forwarding, or they're simply overlooked. It's good practice to always paste the text of the press release in the body of the email as well as include it as an attachment (PDFs are best, as most platforms can read them and it maintains any formatting). Keep the entire message to under 5MB.

#### Press Photos

Attaching a good press photo makes it easier for calendar and events editors to have a pre-packaged blurb and photo that they can drop into an issue, again increasing your likelihood of getting press. Choose a colorful or dynamic image that conveys the theme/tone of your event, and make sure you have permission to use the photo in print before including it, especially if you did not take the photo yourself. You may need to credit the photographer as well. This can be done by changing the filename of the photograph to "Art\_Show\_Photo\_by\_John\_Doe" or something similar as it pertains to your event.

If the image requires explanation, include a photo caption at the top of your press release. For example "(Photo caption): Local author Joe Sixpack reads from his latest book during opening day festivities at Fancy Pants Literature Festival 2011. *Photograph by Jane Sixpack.*"

Images should be 300 dpi resolution - this is the resolution generally required for print. There are a number of tools available online that can help you determine and/or edit the resolution and size of your photo. Make sure you keep an eye on the size of the file - with a little tweaking you'll be able to provide print-ready images that fit under the 5MB email limit.

**BCC:**  
***THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT.*** In this day and age people are very protective of their email address. Having all of the addresses in the BCC (Blind Carbon Copy) field means that no one can see who else you've sent it to. Place your own address in the "TO:" field, and everyone else in the "BCC" field. Not doing this simple step is a mistake made by amateurs and puts your database at risk of being appropriated (and spammed) by other groups.

#### Press Database

Creating and maintaining a press/public relations database is important. If you're starting from scratch, ask around to see if anyone has a basic list that you can use as a starting point. Then, make a list of all of the media outlets you would like to receive your release and spend time on their websites. For print, you are looking for the editor of the section you want to cover your project – Music, Food, Arts, Movies, etc. You may end up with more than one list (by type of media or category) or you may work from one master list.

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Usually websites have an 'About' or 'Staff' link at the bottom of the front page. If you can't find the email, try and figure out the company's email naming convention. It is usually something like First.LastName@companyname.com. Try googling "@companyname.com" (including the quotes) and see what comes up. If you know the editor's name and the company's email naming convention you can figure out their email this way. Or simply call the front desk and ask.

## Timing

In Tampa you can get away with the initial release or announcement going out six weeks prior to the event. If you're looking to get coverage in magazines that only publish monthly you will need to back out your timeline. Four weeks (follow-up release), then two weeks (second follow-up), then week of (final release, just in case). Each release should have the same format and same 'Sell' paragraph but should include the most current information, with any new programming announcements toward the top and in the subject.

## Etiquette

Unless you know an editor or writer personally, you should never reach out to them on Facebook or Twitter in lieu of an official e-mail. There are, of course, exceptions, but use common sense. Social media is a conversational tool based on personal interests. Would you walk up to someone on the street (or in the supermarket) that you've only met briefly and start hard-selling them on your concept? Or would you introduce yourself and maybe suggest meeting to discuss the project at a later date? Be yourself.

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## SAMPLE RELEASE

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 23, 2010

Contact: T. Hampton Dohrman

813. 784.2972

thdohrman@gmail.com

## REFRACTORY

[www.refractorytampa.com](http://www.refractorytampa.com)

October 15, 2010

New Media and Installation Art Show Transforms the Beautiful Tampa Armature Works Building

Tampa, FL – **REFRACTORY** will take place Friday, October 15 at the former Tampa Armature Works (also called the Trolley Barn) building in Tampa Heights (1910 N Ola Ave). This special, one-night-only show runs from 8PM – 11PM. Admission to the show is a suggested donation of \$5.

For one night only, an abandoned factory on the Hillsborough River will be transformed into a kaleidoscope of moving images and media art in an exhibition that engages the historic nature of the building and explores the interstitial space between. This beautiful industrial setting will be the backdrop for more than a dozen local and national new media and video artists. Add to this the installation of the largest Dream Machine ever constructed and you've got an amazing visual experience and artistic product that may be the most exciting art event of the Fall season.

Featured artists include Robert Chambers, Genesis P. Orridge, Negativland, Spanky and Maureen Hudas, Richard Kern, Gerhardt Gruen, James Johnson, Clem Crowder, FaFa, Gean Moreno, Michael LeMieux, Kurt Piazza, Robb Fladry + Aaron Hutcheson, Brian Taylor, Noelle Mason and Ellen Mueller.

Some highlights of **REFRACTORY** include:

**Dream Machine Installation** A stroboscopic flicker device pioneered by the late artist Brion Gysin comes to life in massive proportions. While originally designed as a table-top meditative device, this version is a giant pillar of moving light that creates a striking visual display.

**Negativland** The collective known as Negativland creates music, video, fine art, books, radio and live performances using appropriated sound, image and text. Mixing original materials and original music with things taken from corporately owned mass culture and the world around them, Negativland re-arranges these found bits and pieces to make them say and suggest things that they never intended to. Over the years, Negativland's "illegal" collage and appropriation-based audio and visual works have touched on everything from pranks and media hoaxes to advertising the bizarre banality of suburban existence.

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**Genesis P. Orridge** Recently retired from his involvement with Psychic TV and Throbbing Gristle, musician and artist Genesis P. Orridge is a contemporary of Brion Gysin and William S. Burroughs and has spent recent years focusing on art and writing. Orridge is represented by New York gallery Invisible-Exports.

**Robert Chambers** Best known for his contemporary sculptural installations, the art of Robert Chambers has been exhibited across the country at locations including Miami, Philadelphia, and New York. He has been featured in Art in America, artnet and Arte al Dia and has work in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in New York City.

**Sound Installation by Tetromino** Sound artists John Russell and Yousef Danak team up to create a site-specific sound installation piece based on the cut-up technique of William S. Burroughs, Brion Gysin, and other Beat Hotel-era artists.

**REFRACTORY** is organized by a collaborative of well known Tampa Bay cultural activists including Ken Cowart, Joe Griffith, and T. Hampton Dohrman with assistance from Adam Kitzerow, Gregory Green and Ellen Mueller. This event is made possible through the hard work and generosity of ASD, Experimental Skeleton, Hampton Arts Management, SuperTest and The Heights of Tampa.

For general inquiries, please contact T. Hampton Dohrman at [thdohrman@gmail.com](mailto:thdohrman@gmail.com) or 813.784.2972.