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PR as a Communication Tool: Use a Scalpel, Not a Hatchet

By: Vicki LaBrosse

As a PR professional, I am often asked by clients, “Is there still value in press releases?” I understand why they ask and why some are skeptical of making them part of an overall marketing strategy. After all, when Matt Cutts, head of Google’s Webspam team, announced that links in press releases have no value for SEO, it left business owners and SEO professionals wondering whether the releases are really worthwhile.

But an effective press release is more than an SEO tool. The original intent of a press release, before the Internet era, was to gain credible media coverage from reputable media outlets. If you write and distribute press releases with only SEO in mind, you risk missing out on valuable publicity. The decline of press releases as SEO bait refocuses us on the original purpose of PR: telling a newsworthy story to the media. Link-stuffed releases were a blunt instrument; targeted PR is a scalpel.

Remember that content is key

It takes a thoroughly researched and well-written press release to make it through various syndicates, attract traffic and help in conversion. Although SEO efforts often veer into the highly technical, don’t forget that humans read what you write. Trying to write a release with a focus on keywords alone does not add value or appeal for most readers. Focus your content on the needs and interests of reporters, editors and their audience and your press releases will do a lot more for you than increase your Google rankings. A well-crafted press release has:

- Something truly relevant and new to announce about the company
- Valuable and interesting information, which may include images and videos
- Very few keywords in focus (1-2, rather than loads of keyword phrases)
- A professional, journalistic style, reflecting a knowledgeable reporter’s point of view

Focus on Journalists and Editors

One has to think like a journalist when writing a PR. Give editors and reporters all of the information they need to write their own stories and opinions of your news. Make sure your message doesn’t contain a lot of hype; instead, it contains facts, figures, statistics and quotes from key players that can be repurposed and used by the media to generate new articles.

Distribute through a reputable network

There are a number of free web news distribution sites. They grew around the idea of distributing press releases as an SEO strategy. The idea was to create SEO-optimized releases with backlinks to their websites, to increase traffic. In the past this worked, but Google’s Panda update reclassified press releases on the level of advertising – not SEO-worthy – and the free news distribution sites have suffered accordingly.



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If you have a good news release that is worthy of editorial attention, it's worth the investment to distribute it through a reputable site such as Business Wire, PR Newswire or Marketwired. It's likely that the journalists and editors writing articles on your industry get news from one of the larger traditional newswire services – it's far less likely that they will find your news on the free web.

Work with a PR Professional

To give your scalpel even more precision, work with a PR professional who has knowledge of your industry. A strong PR and media professional will have:

- A list of media contacts; the PR agency delivers your news directly to the inboxes of journalists and editors focused on your industry, giving it the best odds of getting attention.
- An eye for trends and emerging topics that others are not writing about
- Creative ability to pitch a new story idea in a compelling way
- An understanding of the industry publications and their respective editorial styles

In technology-based industries and nontraditional products or services, a strong PR professional is more likely to be found in an industry-specific boutique agency than a large traditional PR and advertising firm. Rather than their energy being diluted, they are focused entirely on your industry and will often have access to journalists or news sources that you may not be aware of.



About the author

Vicki LaBrosse is media relations director with Edge Marketing, Inc. Leveraging more than 13 years of experience working in professional services industries, LaBrosse works with clients to develop and execute comprehensive marketing strategies that will help grow their business.

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