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Keeping your press releases relevant

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A recent survey of journalists by Atlanta PR firm Arketi Group found news releases are used by 90% of business journalists as sources for story ideas.

However, as 54% of those same journalists say they also turn to bloggers, press releases must go beyond simple text and incorporate features like links, social media tags, images, and even video.

"We use two approaches to reach journalists," says Tom Beckett, SVP of marketing at Business Wire (BW). "One, we give journalists all the tools to easily follow and use our press releases. Two, we provide tools for bloggers and social media site users, which in turn can also grab journalists' attention."

For example, when Fisher Price launched Elmo T.M.X Limited Edition for the 2007 holiday season, it leveraged a BW Smart News release with photos and videos.

Not only was the release viewed thousands of times on BW's Web site, but also hundreds of journalists downloaded the multimedia, which ultimately emerged on Web sites of numerous media outlets and blogs, such as Engadget.

Marketwire has also added services to address social media with the launch of Social Media 2.0. The service includes social bookmarks and tags, Second Life news channel distribution, audio headline summaries, search engine-friendly permalinks, social video hosting on Photobucket, photo hosting on YouTube, and more.

"Social media releases are generally formatted so information is easy to scan, utilizing bullets and lists of ready-made quotes instead of dense text," says Paolina Milana, VP of marketing for Marketwire. "A well-written and formatted social media release makes it very easy for journalists to identify and access key content quickly and accurately."

PR Newswire's Multimedia News release also offers the ability to distribute a press release with links, photos, videos, and more with the traditional wire distribution.

"While PR Newswire [PRN] offers the abilities to send press releases with links, photos, videos, and more, the content is what matters most," says Michael Pranicoff, PRN's director of emerging media. "No matter how

much technology you employ to help make your message stand out from the crowd, if the message doesn't resonate itself, the photos, links, and videos won't help it."

When PRN client Bruster's Real Ice Cream did an MNR in conjunction with Lazare Kaplan and Big Brothers Big Sisters about a million dollar ice cream cone, it garnered impressive coverage both in traditional and nontraditional media.

"More importantly, when you do a search in Google still today using just the name 'Bruster's ice cream', [that release] is the fifth listing that comes up in the natural search results," Pranicoff says.

Since debuting a Del.icio.us button on releases in February 2006, PR Newswire has expanded to include the ability for press releases to be used or tagged into various social bookmarking sites like Digg, Newsvine (now owned by MSNBC), Reddit (owned by Condě Nast), and StumbleUpon (owned by eBay).

Having new and social media features will also help a release resonate with different audiences. Hispanic PR Wire, which was recently purchased by PRN, will soon debut an enhanced version of its "Interactivo" service, featuring high-res photo hosting, guaranteed story and photo posting on US Hispanic news sites, live Web site preview, and more social networking media tools.

"Some people argue that traditionally the Hispanic audiences have had challenges accessing content, which is partially true," says Manny Ruiz, president of Hispanic PR Wire. "But now, the Internet is second nature and Latinos, the largest growing segment of Internet users, are accessing it everywhere, on every kind of device.

"The press release of the last century is dead," he adds. "In its place is a dynamic service that is more of an interactive marketing tool, more relevant and compelling for journalists. The difference is, [it's] not only for journalists."

Technique tips

Do

Include links to pages where multiple instances of your key words/phrases reinforce your message

Place terms in key positions like headlines and first paragraphs

Distribute a release through a service that carries hyperlinks to downstream sites such as Yahoo Finance, AOL News, and Netscape

Don't

Go link crazy. Too many links will confuse journalists and draw focus away from key messaging

Use low-res images. Opt for high-res multimedia that can easily be used by layout pros

Use all tools, all the time. Focus first on the message. Use the bells and whistles to complement the campaign