Print This Article

<< Return to Press releases can be good for business

Press releases can be good for business

Craig McGuire
July 28 2008

When engineering press releases today, more PR pros are embracing sophisticated Web 2.0 tactics to not just build buzz with media, but directly influence online consumers.

For example, The Knot, a multimedia company that markets resources for wedding planning, uses Business Wire to distribute releases providing information on the organization - from editorial trends to new partnerships. But as Melissa Bauer, senior PR manager of The Knot, notes, it also uses those releases to market various service areas of the business.

"We look to drive and promote these areas through use of increased hyperlinks, HTML, keywords, and more," she says. "And, not only do we hyperlink, we include pictures and screen grabs that coincide with the release."

These tactics are more important than ever for The Knot, which needs to connect with a growing crop of influential blogs. Those outlets, Bauer says, will often pick up the photos first and then include a brief mention of the news.

"Include relevant links that can directly relate to the news," she advises. "A consumer product announcement should link to a purchase page. But only do it where appropriate - don't overdo it. And be sure the links are working before you send out the release."

Yet it shouldn't be a question of writing for either media or consumers. Malcolm Atherton, account executive and new media specialists for Business Wire, advises his clients that integrating the right components can make releases compelling for both audiences.

"Use bold text and bullets to allow key terminology and thoughts to stand out," he says, noting that as most press releases are viewed on a computer screen, viewers tend to scan rather than read.

"Also, consumers and media want multimedia," he adds. "Making multimedia available [allows] consumers to see a product or service in action, which can trigger an impulse to buy or learn more. It also provides instant access to multimedia that could be used in a blog post."

Meanwhile, for press releases to drive leads, the messaging must be consistent with the language of the customers, says Sarah Skerik, VP of distribution services at PR Newswire.

"Do you shop for home entertainment solutions, or do you shop for a TV or stereo?" she asks. "Start by collaborating with your peers in marketing and advertising, especially those responsible for the Web site. They've [likely] already done some keyword research, determining what search terms audiences look for on information related to your products."

Once that common language is established, Skerik advises focusing on writing a compelling headline, the most vital element for attracting consumers, so limiting the hyperbole is key.

It's also important to prepare for a learning curve. To be successful, PR pros must embrace all that is available in the current online environment, says Paolina Milana, VP of marketing at Marketwire. This includes tagging, blogging, sharing, downloading, watching, and commenting on content - all done in partnership with the marketing/advertising team.

Going beyond traditional media today means reaching consumers directly by distributing releases to online sites, making them available to bloggers, sharing and networking sites, providing RSS feeds, and more, Milana says.

"Within a single press release, photos, video, podcasts, audio clips - along with text - tell the story to potential buyers," Milana says. "SEO enhancements produce more prominent search engine rankings and Web presence, while tagging, bookmarking, and comment options promote sharing of the story." And, all of these elements need to be collected on easy-to-navigate landing pages on the company Web site to support the promotional campaign behind the release.
"Where are today's consumers?" she asks.

"We're in Second Life, iTunes. We Digg what we like and blog about what we don't."

Technique tips
Do
Use keywords that consumers use

Use multimedia, bold text, and bullets

Share the load with marketing, including partnering on Web sites and blogging

Don't
Run too long. No one will read it

Use broad terms. Consumers search for specific products

Use hyperbole. The hard sell is even less successful online