

## WRITING A STRONG PRESS RELEASE

**Is your news newsworthy?** A good press release answers the questions of *who, what, where, when and why* and provides the media with useful information about your organization. Your press release should never read like an advertisement.

**Begin strong.** Your headline and first paragraph should tell the story. The rest of your press release should provide the detail.

**Write for the media.** Write in a journalist style, and make sure you know and consult your Associated Press Stylebook ([www.apstylebook.com](http://www.apstylebook.com)) and follow its usage guide.

**Not everything is news.** Your excitement about something does not necessarily mean that you have a newsworthy story. Think about your audience. Will someone else find your story interesting? Let's assume that you have just spent a lot of effort to celebrate a milestone or anniversary. Announcing your organization's anniversary is always an exciting time for your organization, but the media will possibly find not as uninteresting as you do. Instead, focus on a hook about why the anniversary is relevant. Answer the question, "why should anyone care?" and make sure your announcement has some news values such as timeliness, uniqueness or something truly unusual.

**Stick to the facts.** Avoid fluff, embellishments and exaggerations. Journalists are skeptical and are quick to dismiss language that seems overblown.

**Use quotes to your advantage.** A quote can enhance your press release, and allows the opportunity for a little "editorializing" on your part. Your quote gives the reader a chance to hear first-hand about your museum's excitement for the subject matter. Make them colorful and informative, but still avoid statements that read as pure fluff. Utilize interesting individuals to quote.

**Use words efficiently.** Use each word effectively. Avoid flowerily language, advertising-speak and over-used expressions such as "first time ever." Using too many words can distract a reporter and distracts from your story.

**Don't use industry jargon.** Keep in mind that while in your organization, words common in the industry are easily-understood by all, but may not be by a reporter and almost always are not by the general public. Use ordinary language as much as possible. You may need to include certain keywords to optimize internet search engines, but use them in a way that does not assume your audience understands it all.

**Watch your punctuation.** In addition to consulting your AP Stylebook for specific grammar usage for the media, watch the use of other punctuation, particularly the exclamation point. If you must use an exclamation point, use it sparingly, and never more than one at the end of a sentence. It's a death sentence for your press release.

**Who to contact.** At the top of your press release, clearly state the media contact for your organization, and all the ways that person may be reached. At the end of your press release, indicate who the general public should contact for more information.

**About your company.** Your press release should end with a short paragraph (company boilerplate) that describes your museum, mission, location and history. If you are filing a joint press release, include a boilerplate for both organizations.

## **WAYS TO ABSOLUTELY, POSITIVELY ANNOY REPORTERS**

- Use a lot of graphics in your press release, or sending large photos or files that they haven't asked for.
- Send your e-mail pitches "ganged up" so that reporters see who else you are pitching.
- Fail to ask when you call whether they are on deadline and/or have time to talk with you.
- Don't indicate why you are writing to them in the subject line of your e-mail.
- Attach your news release in a PDF format so the reporter can't cut and paste for the story.
- Pitch a reporter and then be gone for the day when they call back.
- Leave a long, unfocused message on their voicemail.
- Call and pitch reporter without doing any research on his/her beat or geographic region.

## **NEWS RELEASE TEMPLATE**

### **MEDIA CONTACT:**

Betsy Moss  
804.355.5555  
betsymoss@bestmuseum.com

### **HEADLINE ANNOUNCES NEWS IN TITLE CASE, IDEALLY UNDER 80 CHARACTERS**

City, State (Date) – The lead sentence should contain your most important information in 25 words or less. Grab reader's attention here. Do not assume the reader has read your headline.

Continue with short sentences and paragraphs that answer the questions who, what, when, where and why.

Include a quote, if you would like, from an individual with your organization, a trade organization representative, a donor, or someone else affiliated with your news. Use a little more latitude here, but still avoid superlatives such as wonderful, unique and great.

Continue with content that efficiently provides additional information on your lead.

If your news release is regarding an event, use this space to give the public all the information they need to know.

For additional information, please contact Mary Smith at the Best Museum: 804-555-1234 or by e-mail at mary.smith@bestmuseum.com.

End with your organization's boilerplate.

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## **Examples of Press Release Boiler Plates**

### **ABOUT JAMESTOWN 2007**

Jamestown 2007, a sub-agency of the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation, coordinated efforts to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Jamestown, Va., the first permanent English settlement in the Americas. The nation's first representative government, free enterprise system and culturally diverse society began at Jamestown. State, national, and international commemorative events to salute these legacies began in May 2006 and continue into 2008. Major corporate sponsors of America's 400th Anniversary include Norfolk Southern Corporation (NYSE: NSC), Verizon (NYSE: VZ) and The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. Other supporters include Anheuser-Busch Companies, Inc. (NYSE: BUD), AirTran Airways (NYSE: AAI), Consol Energy and CNX Gas Corporation, Dominion, James City County, Lockheed-Martin, McGuireWoods LLP, Philip Morris USA, SunTrust, TowneBank and Wolseley PLC/Ferguson Enterprises, Inc. Contributors include the City of Poquoson and Rutherford Insurance. More information about the commemoration is available at [www.Americas400thAnniversary.com](http://www.Americas400thAnniversary.com).

### **ABOUT KINGS DOMINION**

Kings Dominion is owned and operated by Cedar Fair Entertainment Company, a publicly traded partnership that is listed for trading on The New York Stock Exchange under the symbol "FUN." In addition to Kings Dominion, Cedar Fair owns and operates ten other amusement parks, six water parks, one indoor water park resort, and five hotels. Cedar Fair also owns and operates Star Trek: The Experience, an interactive adventure located in Las Vegas, and operates the Gilroy Gardens Family Theme Park in Gilroy, Calif. under a management contract.

### **ABOUT THE MUSCARELLE MUSEUM OF ART**

The Muscarelle Museum of Art is located on Jamestown Road on the campus of The College of William & Mary. The Museum is open from 10:00 a.m.- 5:00 p.m. Tuesday through Friday and 12:00 noon to 4:00 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday. The Museum is closed on Mondays. Docent tours are available at 2:00 p.m. on Sundays and other times to be announced. During these exhibitions, there is an admission fee of \$10. Admission is free for Museum Members; College of William & Mary faculty, staff, and students; and children under twelve. For more information about this exhibit or the Muscarelle in general, please call 757-221-2700 or visit [www.wm.edu/muscarelle](http://www.wm.edu/muscarelle).

## A WELL-WRITTEN E-MAIL PITCH TO A REPORTER

To: areporter@mydaily news.com  
From: betsymoss@bestmuseum.com  
Subject: A story idea regarding unique item coming to Best Museum  
Date: September 1, 2009  
Dear Al:

You might be interested in a story about a unique donation Best Museum was given today for its collection.

**The item is a rare World War II diary from the personal papers of Joe Smith. Mr. Smith is one of the oldest survivors living in our state.**

Our director, Bill Best, is available for an interview at your convenience to tell you more about how this acquisition came to be; in addition, I would be glad to arrange a time for you to speak with Mr. Smith, or can provide you with contact information for him. Though almost 94 years old, Mr. Smith is very sharp and would be a colorful addition to your story.

I have a press release and several images which I can get to you upon request – these include photos of the diary pages and Mr. Smith's visit here recently.

Please let me know if this is of interest to you – my contact information is below, including my cell phone.

Best regards,

Betsy Moss  
Public Relations Manager  
Best Museum  
betsymoss@bestmuseum.org  
Office: 804.555.1234  
Cell: 804.555.5678

**A FLAWED E-MAIL PITCH TO A REPORTER**

To: areporter@mydaily news.com; breporter@mydailynews.com;  
favreporter@localtv.com; katiecouric@cbsnews.com

From: betsymoss@bestmuseum.com

Subject: Idea

Date: September 1, 2009

Hi everyone --

Here at Best Museum our mission is to continue to find that our collections are continually growing and that the public looks to us as a repository of history in our state. We continue to fill that mission every day, as you probably know. Recently we received a very extraordinary gift from a man who is very special. I've attached a press release about this spectacular gift and invite you to read more about it. I've also attached four JPG photos of this gift and the man who donated it, as well as a PDF brochure about our organization.

I hope you will consider writing about this – it would mean a lot to our organization to have this gift profiled.

Best regards,

Betsy Moss  
Public Relations Manager  
Best Museum

BEST MUSEUM  
Simply the Best.

## **COMMUNICATING YOUR STORY TO THE MEDIA**

E-mail is the preferred method of communication with reporters.

Phone calls can be a way to communicate, particularly if you are following up. Ask if they are on deadline, and be very efficient with your words. Get to the point quickly.

Be ready to provide the media with everything they need as soon as you make a pitch to them – have your spokesperson available, and images and any background material ready.

They are always under pressure and on deadlines. All communication should be focused, and follow up need to be quick.