

How to.....

Write a press release



Press releases are one of the most effective ways to promote the activity of your club.

The most effective press releases will catch newsdesk attention by following a successful formula.

Like everything else, it's easy once you know 'How To'.

Title

Use a title that sums up your news with no ambiguity.

e.g. 'University Club holds 24 hour relay for Arthritis UK'

Newsrooms receive so many press releases everyday that editors need to know immediately if your email has the potential to interest them. As such, the title should communicate the essence of the story and fit into the subject box. Only an effective title will entice an editor to even open your email.

It's tempting to create a flashy title - but don't. It will only make journalists laugh *at* you, not *with* you. Neither is it a good idea to use exclamation marks because the story in its own right should be strong enough to create an impact. Using punctuation in attempt to catch attention will only create the impression that you don't understand news value.

e.g. 'They do run-run run, for who run-run-run?!'

Paragraph One

The first paragraph should sum up your story in no more than two sentences. As such, it will probably be a slightly elaborated version of your title.

E.g. Students from the University of Strathclyde's Running Club recently held a 24 hour relay to raise funds for Arthritis UK.

Paragraph Two

The second paragraph should include details of the story you've highlighted in paragraph one.

E.g. The relay took place in Glasgow Green on the 17th June. Over one hundred people came along to support the event, which raised the grand total of £1500.

Subsequent Paragraphs

If there's more detail to your story, then you can elaborate with further paragraphs. For example, you might want to go into the history of the event, why the event was chosen, or why your club chose to support a particular charity.

E.g. This is the third annual event of its kind that the Running Club has held.

Over the years, 24 hour relays have proven to be a hugely effective way to draw attention to a cause. This year has been no exception.

The members chose to support Arthritis UK, in the knowledge that over time, many runners will develop the condition. Although running has many health benefits, it can cause wear and tear of the joints which makes arthritis not uncommon.

Quotes

Always end your press release with at least one quote, but no more than three.

Usually this will include quotes from the event organiser, any VIPs present and a relevant external opinion. Using our example event, this might involve the chair of the running club, a participating marathon runner and a representative from Arthritis UK.

Always include the speaker's full name and connection to your event.

Remember that quotes are a great way to inject a more human, qualitative appraisal of the event so use this opportunity, as it's not appropriate elsewhere in the press release.

Avoid the temptation to include clichés, or sentences that don't really add anything to the account of your event.

It's perfectly acceptable to draft a quote on behalf of someone else, but **NEVER ISSUE THE QUOTE BEFORE SECURING THE APPROVAL OF THE PERSON IT HAS BEEN ATTRIBUTED TO.**

Make sure the quote is appropriate to the person it's been attributed to. Think carefully about their perspective and what they might want to say which nobody else can.

E.g. Chair of the Running Club, Dave Speedy, said:

"A lot of planning goes into this sort of event so I'm delighted that it was so successful.

We're really grateful to everyone who took part, as well as everyone who came along to support them.

This is an incredible amount of money to have risen and I know it's going to a very worthwhile cause."

Five times marathon runner, Bob. A. Long, who took part in the relay, said:

"Of all the races I've done, this has to be up there with the best. It's a unique event with a unique atmosphere.

I was really thrilled that so many people turned up to cheer us on. That makes a huge difference in the last lap when the tiredness is kicking in! It was better than any energy drink!"

Fundraising Director, Gail Smith, from Arthritis UK, said:

"We're very grateful to the University of Strathclyde Running Club for organising such a fantastic event to raise money for Arthritis UK.

Living with arthritis is a life sentence, but there are things we can do to make patients more comfortable and help them live their lives to the full.

The Running Club's donation will go towards walking aids for our members so they can continue to enjoy an active outdoor life."

When and how?

When sending a press release, always include the time you'd like the information to go public. For example the title in the subject box will normally be followed with: "...For immediate release." This should be repeated on the press release at the very top of the page.

It's also possible to embargo a press release for a later date. This means you can issue the release ahead of the time you'd like it to go public, so newsdesks have it prepared. This is an effective technique if you'd like to make the news on a particular day.

Be aware that newsdesks are so fast paced that sending a press release too far in advance risks firing it into oblivion, as it will not be a priority for daily news.

If you'd like to embargo, write your embargo date and time next to the title in the subject box, as well as at the top of your document.

E.g. "Embargoed for 12/09/13 at 00:00 hours."

Sending a press release in advance

If you'd like to draw numbers to your event, then securing some press coverage in advance is a good idea. Aim to issue the release two weeks ahead of schedule if you're targeting local news. If however, your story is of national significance, it's better to send it only a week in advance. (If this is the case then you should also talk to our Policy & Public Affairs Adviser as far in advance as possible. Contact details below).

Sending a retrospective press release

If you'd like to report on the success of your event, it's best to issue your release as soon as the event is over. News grows old very quickly, so if a couple of days have passed then really, it's too late.

Before sending a press release, always run it past the USSA's Communications Manager, Julie Grant, for approval.

Standing Items

It may sound like stating the obvious, but it's important to clearly identify where your news article has finished by typing "ENDS" on the line below the last line of the text. This will clearly distinguish the text you'd like to go public, from the notes for newsroom use.

Always end your press release with release with a contact name and number, so if a reporter needs more information, they know who to call.

Finally, include a section entitled 'Notes to editors' at the bottom. Use this to bullet point standard information about your club. This can include any sort of information that isn't directly relevant to the story, but may provide a reporter with a little bit of context.

E.g. Notes to Editors

- *The Strathclyde University Running Club has existed for six years.*
- *The Club currently has 86 members*
- *Anyone interested in joining the club should email Dave on iamtired@mylegshurt.com*

If you have any further questions, please contact the USSA's Policy & Public Affairs Adviser, Carolyn McCole, at Carolyn.mccole@strath.ac.uk