

Writing Good Press Releases and Working with the Media

presented by Kathy Dempsey
of Libraries Are Essential

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Commission CE Webinar





Basic Rules for Effective Messages

- Know your audience (media + public).
- Your message & medium must fit your audience.
- Rewrite the same message for different audiences (especially opening lines).
- Share benefits, not just functions.
- Use clear, customized communication.

www.jkup.net/terms.html

It's all about communication!



By taylorsloan on Flickr

How to Write Great Press Releases

1. Use an official template for consistency.
2. Have a clear, informative headline (and, if email, subject line).
3. Include the "who, what, when, where, why" *plus* why it matters.
4. Say whether photos are available.
5. When writing, focus more on being clear than on being colorful.

1. Let's Talk Templates

- The library's name
- The phrase "press release" or "media advisory"
- Logo
- Date
- Name & contact info of PR person
- Pictures??
- Library's basic info, address, phone, & URL

Super Awesome Library System Dempsey Branch

111 Kathy St., Super City, NJ 00001



Press release

For release: Feb. 31, 2012

From: Kathy Dempsey, PR Goddess

KD@SuperAwesome.lib.us

111-222-3456

Photos of stuff available

Library Has Super Awesome Stuff!

Jafkljfkjfl WHO adfskzjakf WHAT oashfp[dogojslfj

Kfaj WHEN fjdklfjdf'

Lfakfjldafjklj WHERE fkanfajdkfnk WHY ohalfnojlkjkl

Jpatroiijpg MATTERS BECAUSE jponj ofandklak.a!

#end#

Boilerplate Info

Super Awesome Library 123 Great St., Super City, NJ 00001 111-222-3400

2. Clear Headlines & Subject Lines

“Library Hosting Big Author Event”

“Smith Library Hosting Stephen King”

“Smith Library to Hold Video Contest”

“Teens Can Create Videos; Win Prizes”

“News from Smith Library”

“Smith Library Gets 20 New PCs for Public”

3. Tell Them Why It Matters

“Smith Library just installed 20 new computers for the public to use.”

“Smith Library’s public computers have been so busy that some people have had to wait in line to check their email or send their resumes. To meet the demand, the library just installed 20 new computers for the public to use. Now it will be easier for users to take care of business, quickly and efficiently.”

WOW
!!!

4. Do You Want Pics With That?

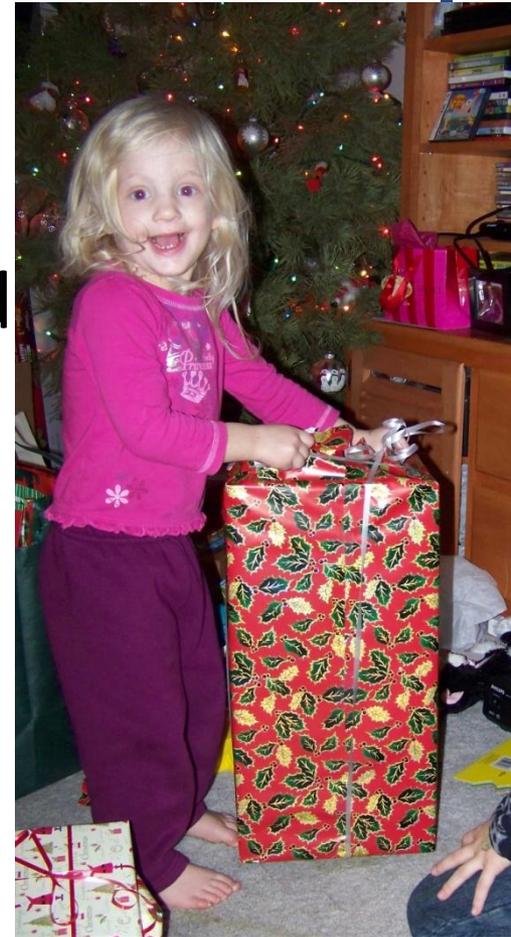
Pictures always draw more attention to a story. They also fill space.

When it's a toss-up between filler stories, the one w/ a pic gets picked

Don't send low-quality pictures.

Always ID people with their correctly spelled names & title; and say who took the picture.

Offer a caption that explains what's happening in the shot.



5. Be Clear, Not Colorful

The pros don't use prose in PRs.

Just the facts, ma'am. This is not the place for stories, adjectives, or clever wordplay.

You can include the obligatory quote from the Big Cheese, but it may not be used.

Triple-check the spellings of all names and the proper days/dates/times.

Spell-check is no replacement for live proofreading.

Any Questions So Far?



Poll Question

**Does your library or info center
still mail out paper press releases
or does it email them?**

- We mail paper.
- We send email.
- We use both.
- I'm not sure.

Good & Bad Press Releases

- Has library name, logo, contact info
 - Tells Who, What, When, Where, Why – and what the benefits are! Grabs interest.
 - Repeats the most vital info
 - Correct, clear, brief writing; proofread
 - Offers graphics
- Has library name
 - Tells what's going on, but not why it matters
 - Media contact unclear
 - No URL
 - Cute, creative writing, unclear explanations, grammar/punc. errors
 - Offers no graphics

How to Communicate With the Media

- Find out who covers libraries; address PRs by name.
- Find out exactly how they prefer to receive PRs.
- Find out what the deadlines are for each medium.
- Find out what topics they do & do not cover.
- Make sure they know how to contact *you* when they want to.
- Have basic info and general photos always available on your website. (Press Room!)

...communicate with the media

- Develop relationships with a few key members of the media.
- Keep a spreadsheet of info listing each contact.
- Become a reliable source for the media.
- Don't expect to have every event mentioned by the press.
- When you're planning something really big, tell them in advance and arrange for coverage.
- Thank members of the press for good coverage.

Poll Question

**Do you have a first-name relationship
("Hi, it's Kathy from Smith Library")
with at least one member of the local media?**

- Yes
- No
- I've never tried to build one.
- I tried but he / she wasn't interested.

How to Give Good, Positive Interviews

- Have designated spokespeople to keep your message consistent.
- Have a plan for dealing with interview requests.
- Practice fielding questions so it's not intimidating.
- Be aware that parts of answers can be taken out of context.
- Know what your main message is, & say it more than once.
- Keep answers short and simple, and avoid jargon.



... give good interviews

If necessary, buy yourself time to think before answering a question. Buy the time by:

- + Repeating or rephrasing the question
- + Saying something like "Let me make sure I understand the question. You're asking..."
- + Saying something intelligent such as, "I want to think this through so I can give you a clear answer."
- + Saying, "That's a good question..."



... give good interviews

Be prepared with helpful phrases for difficult situations:

- + "I'm sorry, but I'm not authorized to discuss that topic. Let me connect you with the person who can help you."
- + "I'm really not the right person to answer that question. But I'm happy to find someone who can help you."

... give good interviews

Turn tough questions around with phrases like:

- + "That's one way to think of it, but in reality, it's..."
- + "That's an interesting question, but a better question is, 'blah blah blah...' ."
- + "That's one way of looking at it, although we prefer...."
- + "That's a common misconception, and the truth is that..."

... give good interviews

Never say these phrases:

- + No comment.
- + This is off the record.
- + I have no idea.
- + You're wrong
about that.



How not to repeat negatives when answering tough questions

Reporter: "Yesterday, police nabbed a drug dealer who was sending emails from the library. Doesn't that mean your library is a dangerous place, especially for parents to bring their children to?"

Negative answer: "No, the library is not a dangerous place. People should not be afraid to bring their children here."
(This repeats the negative "dangerous" and adds "afraid.")

Positive answer: "The library has always been a safe place. This was simply an isolated incident, and the alleged offender is in custody now."

Answering tough questions

Reporter: "With our city's budget in crisis, why is your library still asking for more funding? In this bad economy, isn't it more important to fund things like emergency services and schools? People don't really need libraries anymore since everyone has internet connections at home."

Negative answer: "Our library needs more money to be able to operate. We don't want to lay off people like other businesses have had to do. Emergency services are important when people need them, but people need to use our library everyday. The internet does not replace us."

Answering tough questions

Positive answer: "In times of budget crisis, libraries are more essential than ever. This fact has been proven again and again over the years by measuring usage statistics. [add stats if you can.] Our services *help people* to save money and to find new jobs if they've been laid off. Not everyone has internet access at home; in fact, in our area, only [xxx] percent does. Libraries are institutions that help people during tough times, by providing their internet access, by helping them rewrite resumes, by allowing them to borrow books & movies & music free of charge, and by being a safe place for community members to meet and interact. And since we offer a [xxx] percent return on investment of taxpayer dollars, that proves that funding our library during this financial crisis is one of the smartest things our county can do."

Any More Questions?



More to Explore

- Press release template from Gale Cengage:
http://www.gale.cengage.com/power/marketing/pr_template.htm
- Info on talking to the media:
<http://www.ala.org/advocacy/advleg/advocacyuniversity/toolkit/mediatools>
- Forbes.com interview: “How NOT To Do Public Relations” <http://tinyurl.com/6vbw8co>

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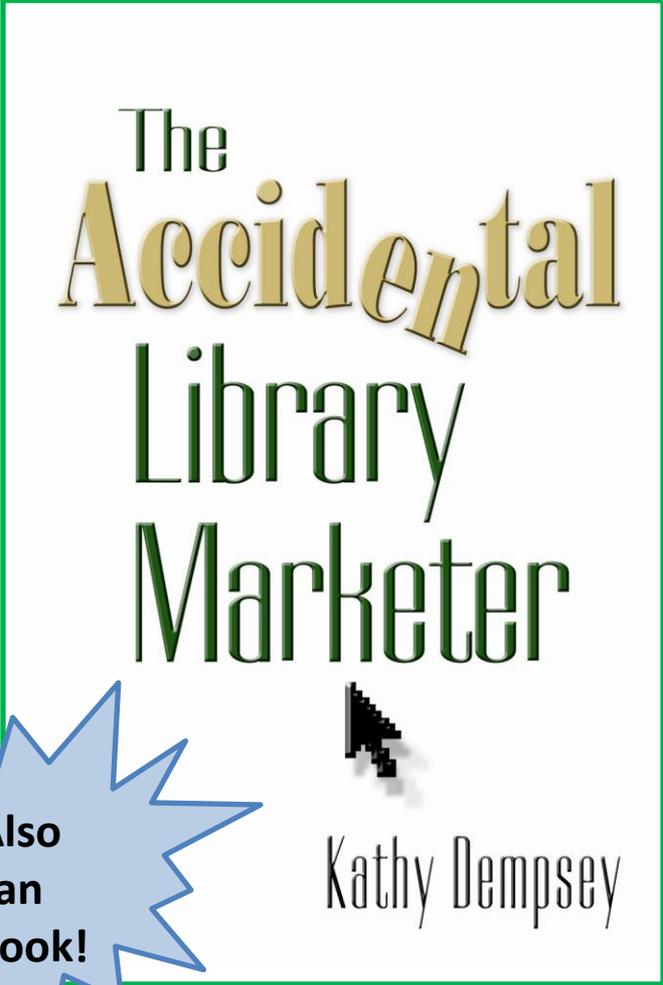
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**Also
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ebook!**