



The news release is probably the most effective tool for getting your message spread throughout the community. It is the easiest, cheapest and most common method used by public relations professionals to generate publicity. You, too, can use it to spread the good news about your Toastmasters club. Newspapers are the most likely sources for publicizing your event. Reporters are always looking for stories, and they rely on press releases for information and ideas. But to get your release printed, it should have an interesting “news hook” and be delivered to the correct person, ahead of deadlines and in an appropriate format.

DIRECT IT TO THE RIGHT PERSON

Both editors and reporters receive releases. For example, in a small daily or weekly newspaper you may work closest with the editor, while at a major newspaper you may send your news release to the reporter who specializes in your area of interest.

Direct your news release to the person who would be most likely to get it published. Toastmasters activities usually wouldn't be considered “hard” news, so your best bet is to send your release to the features editor, rather than to the city editor or the news editor.



KEEP DEADLINES IN MIND

Timing is an important factor in preparing an effective news release. Editors don't like to receive a release about events that have already happened. A newspaper prints only fresh news to keep the interest of its readers.

If you aren't familiar with a newspaper's deadlines, call and ask. The earlier you deliver your news release before the deadline, the better your chances are of getting it printed. Also find out how they prefer to be contacted: via fax, e-mail or standard mail?

USE CORRECT FORMAT

The news release is only effective if it's read by someone. Using correct format allows you to present the information in a clear, logical manner and adds visual appeal to your message.

All news releases should be typed, double-spaced and include your name, address and telephone number. It also should be dated and have an attention-grabbing headline. If you aren't using stationery with “News Release” printed on it, type those words at the top of the page.

If someone else is better suited to answer questions about the release, include this person as a contact, along with his or her telephone number and address. It is important to include both home and business telephone numbers, or numbers where you may be reached during the day and evening. You want to show reporters that you are cooperative by treating their calls as a priority. A reporter using your release may need clarification immediately, even if it's after regular working hours.

THE NEWS RELEASE – HOW AND WHEN TO USE IT

Following is an example of standard news release format:

For Immediate Release

Date:

Contact: Name:

Address:

Telephone Number (Day):

(Evening):

Headline:

The body of the news release should be accurate, concise and well written. Always double-check for accuracy all names, titles and dates. Begin with an attention-getting lead that includes the who, what, when, where and why of your message.

For example:

Who: Jo Anna McWilliams, Toastmasters International President

What: Speech to local business leaders

When: Friday, February 21, 2001, at noon

Where: The Hilton Hotel, Meeting Room B

Why: To discuss the importance of verbal communication skills in business

In subsequent paragraphs use supporting facts and details to expand on the lead: Try to put yourself in the reporter's shoes and position the story according to the interests of the readers. Keep it no longer than two pages, double spaced. Be brief; most newspapers will not publish your release but will rewrite it to suit the interests of their readers.

What topics could generate a release? Anything! The simple fact that your club exists is enough to warrant a feature article about overcoming fear of public speaking and how members have benefited by their improved communication skills. Other topics for news releases could include club and district events, anniversaries, visits by district or international officers, communication and leadership award recipients, educational recognitions, officer elections, etc.

FOLLOW-UP

You may want to follow up by calling or e-mailing the reporter to verify that the release was received and to offer any additional information that may be required. After this conversation it is up to the editor or reporter to decide if your release will be used for a story.

Reporters receive a lot of press releases, are busy and don't want to be bothered by "pushy PR people." They'll usually prefer to contact you if they are interested. Try to be as accommodating as possible.

Don't be discouraged if your story isn't printed. Newspaper space is limited and there is a good deal of competition for the available space. Even if your release isn't printed, consider the process a learning experience. Perhaps you've made a contact at the newspaper that may be useful at a later date. Be patient and persistent, and use what you've learned when planning your next publicity campaign.



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