

Your Guide to Pitching Stories and Getting PR



Susan Young

Award-winning news reporter, PR entrepreneur, online editor and speaker

Named one of the “Top 75 Badass Women on Twitter”

www.Getinfrontcommunications.com

Entrepreneurs: 4 Ways to Use Press Releases to Get Publicity

One of the most confusing parts of a small business owner's marketing plan is the press release. While virtually all entrepreneurs understand that [marketing and publicity](#) are essential to business success, how and when to write a press release is baffling.

In the social media landscape, many wonder if press releases are still relevant. As a former radio news reporter and news director, I say, yes, they are relevant. But ONLY when used to announce something that's newsworthy.

Therein lies the confusion. How do you know what's newsworthy? What do reporters and bloggers look for and cover?

Here are four press release strategies for small business owners:

1. Avoid self-promotion. Remember that in the word "newsworthy" is the word "new." When writing a press release or a pitch be sure you have a fresh angle on a story, trend or issue. Your announcement must be timely, relevant and compelling to the public. It must fit with the reporter's [niche or demographic](#). Sales pitches are for the advertising department, not the newsroom. Hire a PR coach or scour the Internet for reliable information on how to write and frame your story. Many of my blog posts cover this topic. Discover how you can help reporters and editors. The key is to build relationships and become a trusted resource. Before you begin writing a press release, ask yourself, "Who cares?" If your announcement doesn't impact the public, you're on the wrong path.

2. Keep your news antennae on 24/7. News is about people. People love great stories. You have [great stories](#) right under your nose, but you're busy running your graphic design company, Etsy shop or photography business. And, of course, you're consumed with learning social media and personal commitments. Take your earbuds out and pay attention to what's happening around you. What topics are trending that you can monitor and post comments and insights? Is your company celebrating an anniversary? Have you recently expanded or gotten a small business grant? How have you helped a client to succeed? Do you have an interesting hobby or talent that's out of the ordinary?

3. Think multimedia. Reporters expect to see more than words; they want images, action and video. They want to hear something. Have you considered using your cell phone or a flip cam to record your [press release or pitch](#)? These tools allow the reporter to get to know you by hearing you explain your story and watching your body language. Think about how a Pinterest board can visually tell your story. We live in a creative space. Stand out by inviting news decision makers to connect with you on an exciting and deeper level.

4. Write tip-sheet style releases. To build your credibility, help people solve their problems. Position yourself as the authority in your industry. Think of it like this: People have a pain, and you have the medicine (solution) to ease their discomfort. The tip-sheet format (like this list) is useful because it's reader-friendly and allows people to skim content and glean nuggets of information. Our cognitive bandwidth is more limited than ever. Brevity is usually appreciated.

Once you have created a few press releases, think about how you can repurpose them into blog posts, short video clips, slide decks and Instagram stories. Minor tweaks to the format can easily [create new content](#) and marketing pieces.

The bottom line: Your presence affects your prosperity. Don't be the best-kept secret!

10 Ways to Create Your Best News Pitch Ever

Words wield power.

If you're trying (desperately) to get the attention of news reporters and bloggers, you know the magic lies in [your writing](#). Don't discount the writing component of PR. Sure, your pitch may include multimedia, but you still must be able to craft—not cobble together—a brief and compelling email, tweet or message to an influencer.

Here are 10 ways to create your best news pitch by simply focusing on your word choice.

1. **Be sure** that every word in every single sentence adds to your [pitch](#) and story. There's no time to waste with unnecessary words that clutter your communication.
2. **Be sure** that every word and every sentence builds on the one before it. A logical flow to your writing is essential. There's no room for confusion.
3. **Be sure** that you rewrite and edit several times before hitting send. I've written and edited more than 20,000 news stories, blog posts, press releases and speeches. No one is so good that he or she can write without at least one round of edits.
4. **Be sure** to use words that connect with emotions. The psychology of your word choice is woven into your intended outcome. What do you want the recipient to do? How do you want your reader to *feel*? What result do people want? Do the [emotions](#) behind your words compel the recipient to hit the reply button and ask for more information? Or have you left him or her hanging? Don't write for the logical mind; write for the emotional heart.
5. **Be sure** your visuals—which likely contain limited words and phrases—are the best combination for your small design space. You'll likely find yourself searching for synonyms and short words that quickly drive your message. Think about the words or phrases in memes, infographics and video clips.
6. **Be sure** keywords are included in subject lines and headlines. They will jump off the page or screen to pique the interest of a reporter or blogger.
7. **Be sure** to read a lot. Voracious readers are often skilled writers.
8. **Be sure** your language hits on topics and “sweet spots” of the people you are pitching. Show them that you understand what's relevant to them.
9. **Be sure** to consider your pitch as a work of art. Choose your language with the utmost care and precision. You can't rush creativity. It will take time. Do you think Michelangelo or Shakespeare were hasty in fashioning their masterpieces?
10. **Be sure** to avoid jargon and rhetoric. If your pitch is full of it, please reread Nos. 1 to 9.

In the end, you must be proud of the pitch you've created. After all, your name is on it. And, if you don't love your pitch, chances are [reporters](#) won't either.

Secrets to Pitching Major News Media

How do you gain trust and influence with reporters at big time news outlets?

Joe Connolly receives hundreds of pitches and press releases every week. He's the small business reporter for [WCBS Radio and Bloomberg](#) in New York.

Like Connolly, I have been on the receiving end of pitches from businesses, government agencies and nonprofits. Some days you don't know whether to laugh or cry.

In a recent interview, I asked Connolly to share some dos and don'ts when pitching stories. For example, Connolly admits he has a hang-up when the word "announce" is in the open paragraph.

"If [the release](#) says 'so-and-so is pleased to announce,' I don't read any further. I don't want self-serving. The headline and lead have got to ring true."

The secret sauce

You may be surprised, but Connolly suggests that anyone writing a news release start two-to-three months in advance. "Follow your local paper, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, television and radio until you see or hear something about your industry. Look for things that you think are [really good, really on the mark, and really accurate](#). Then call or e-mail that reporter saying you saw the article or interview. Tell them, 'I'm exactly like XXXX, you might be interested to know we are also doing such and such...'"

Connolly goes on to remind us about the importance of complimenting reporters. "They are just like anybody else. They want to get positive feedback, and they'll think, 'Wow, this is a sharp person.' A lot of my frequent contacts are people who reached out to me because they heard me talking about something that rang a bell in their industry."

The best opening line for a phone pitch

Like so many other reporters, Connolly's pet peeve when [getting pitched](#) on the phone is in the opening line. "If I answer the phone, don't ask me how I am. Just say, 'Hi Joe, this is xx from X Company, are you on deadline?' That's the best opening line of all. I just think that's the greatest way to open a call with a reporter." Note to self: Connolly prefers e-mail pitches.

The final tip

For [important media](#), call and pitch the story yourself. You are the business owner, says Connolly.

"Whatever you do, don't have a summer intern call around with news releases. That is an insult unless they are calling a 23-year-old reporter who is starting out."

Follow Connolly on Twitter [@JoeConnollybiz](#).

Susan Young—CEO of Get in Front Communications, Inc.—is an award-winning news reporter, PR entrepreneur, online editor and speaker.

She works with entrepreneurs who want a step-by-step process to create compelling content and PR that increases visibility, credibility and revenues.

During her career, Susan has written and edited some 20,000 news stories, blog posts and articles. Susan's latest achievement: Being named one of the 'Top 75 Badass Women on Twitter.'