

7 TIPS FOR WRITING A KILLER



PRESS RELEASE

"The press release is basically the butter knife of the PR writers' toolkit," says Long, who is director of writing at MPS/PRCC at Georgetown University. "They end up dragging it out for everything in the world, and most of the time it's a poor choice."

01 REMEMBER THAT NOBODY CARES.



"I always imagine that the idea I'm pitching is the least attractive for an obscure organization on a topic that nobody wants to hear," Long says.

It's a good mental exercise. It forces you to strive to find an interesting angle. Long used to ghost-write, he says, and most clients were way more interested in themselves than everybody else could ever be. The same is true for your news release.

02 KEEP YOUR GOAL IN MIND.

The purpose of a press release isn't to make your poobahs happy by touting minor product developments that no reporter would ever cover. Long says you should treat a press release as a purposeful document with a single goal: to elicit a call back from a reporter.



03 CONSIDER 'DO' VS. 'APPLAUD' PRESS RELEASES.



There are two styles of press release, which Long labels "Do vs. Applaud." Either your organization did something and is bragging about it, or you are applauding something--possibly someone else's achievement--so you can "bask in reflected glory." Think of a nonprofit's endorsement of a bill offered in Congress.

04 FIT IT ALL ON ONE PAGE.

Every press release should fit on an 8 1/2 -by-11 sheet of paper, Long says. Better yet, don't fill the sheet. This is not a place for an essay on your event or product. Write short paragraphs--four lines maximum. Use lots of white space.



05 LIST REAL CONTACTS UP TOP.



Long offers a helpful template for a press release. Some of it may seem like common sense, but apparently a reminder is needed, given the number of organizations that put out badly structured press releases.

06 BE DIRECT IN YOUR HEADLINE.

Here's Long's template:
"Headline: Client Does Something."

The client usually wants its name up front. This solves that problem. Also, this style of headline deals right away with the "Guess what" aspect, Long says.



07 REMEMBER THE LONG GAME.



The pitch is a long game. If you begin to deliver straightforward press releases, journalists "will understand that's how you do business," Long says. "You're an honest broker. You talk directly to them. Over time, that adds up."