

# POWER UP YOUR PUBLIC RELATIONS

A Guide To Effective  
Public Relations



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Press releases, fact sheets, media advisories, and press events enable you to obtain invaluable media coverage of your products and solutions. Your relationship with suppliers and customers can also be a source of valuable publicity for your company.

Public relations is a powerful tool for shaping and influencing perceptions of your company and your product. Through effective public relations, you can:

- Raise awareness of your company and products
- Translate technology features into customer benefits
- Maximize your strengths and minimize weaknesses
- Establish brand loyalty
- Complement advertising

To make your public relations work, you need to start with the basics: good products and marketing strategy, a newsworthy subject, and much attention to timeliness and detail. Like advertising, publicity helps you to position your company in the best possible light. However, it is often more subtle and long-term, and does not involve direct control of content. Public relations involves:

- Communicating through third parties. Because its written by an outside source (a reporter), publicity has the credibility of a third-party endorsement.
- Influence, not control. While you can greatly influence the content with publicity, you cant ultimately control it.
- News value. Your announcement must be perceived as news, and must be presented in a factual, objective manner to be picked up by the media.
- Editorial relationships. Building and maintaining relationships with key editors, and assisting them to do their jobs, is key to effective publicity.

## **About This Publicity Guide**

The purpose of this publicity guide is to help you understand how publicity works and what you can do to influence it, so you can obtain as much coverage as possible. The guide consists of the following sections:

### **Publicity Fundamentals**

#### **— A Few Tips to Get You Started**

If your company has not worked extensively with the press, this section is a good place to start. It reviews some of the fundamentals of media relations.

### **Getting the Most from Your Press Releases**

This section presents writing, formatting, and timing tips that will help make your press releases more effective. It also contains guidelines for making the most of your relationship with suppliers and customers in the press.

### **Industry Publications**

This section contains valuable information for formulating your press list, including profiles, target audience descriptions, and editorial contacts for key computer-industry publications.

## 2. PUBLICITY FUNDAMENTALS

A few tips to get you started

This section provides an overview of some of the principles of media relations, to help you work effectively with the press. It tells you how to:

- Select an appropriate subject.
- Match subject matter and audience to publication type.
- Work with the local press.
- Take advantage of different publicity vehicles.
- Follow up on your editorial contacts for maximum impact.

### 3. SELECTING AN APPROPRIATE SUBJECT

#### What does the press consider newsworthy?

The press receives far more publicity than it has room to publish. Consequently, the majority of press releases never make it into print. To increase the likelihood of press coverage, it's important to determine if and why your subject is newsworthy.

A newsworthy subject is:

#### **Fresh.**

You must be announcing something new — something that was not previously known. To help you determine the news focus of your announcement — the news hook, as it is referred to by the media — try coming up with a newspaper-style heading that summarizes the news in your announcement.

#### **.1 Benefit Oriented**

Your materials should emphasize how your product or solution will benefit your customers. Try mentally putting yourself in your customers' shoes, then ask, "Why should I care?" The answers you come up with are the key benefits of your product or solution. Make sure your press release highlights these benefits.

#### **.2 Innovative**

If you are writing about a new product or solution that your company has developed, emphasize the innovative qualities of that product or solution. What elements of it have never been applied before?

#### **.3 Reflective of Industry Trends**

Readers are always interested in keeping up with new trends. If you can show how your product or solution fits into broader industry trends, you will increase the newsworthiness of your story. For example, your relationship with Microsoft as a Solution Provider can be depicted as part of an industry trend to augment the distribution of shrinkwrapped, packaged product with customer-oriented activities.

## 4. MATCHING SUBJECT MATTER AND AUDIENCE

### .1 Categories of publications

The publications you will be dealing with may be divided into four broad categories:

- General trade press covers general news about the PC industry.
- Vertical trade press focuses on a particular industry segment, such as banking, law, or accounting.
- Local general press covers general news for a particular city or area.
- Local business press focuses on business news for a particular city or area.

### .2 Subject matter

Appropriate subjects for publicity include:

- Supplier and Customer relationships. Announcement of your company's relationship with its suppliers and customers.
- New products or solutions. Descriptions of new products or solutions you have developed through your partnership with suppliers and customers.
- Case studies. Successful application of your solutions.
- Trends. Discussion of industry trends and how your product or solution reflects these trends.
- Personalities. Success stories on key people in your organization.
- Key milestones. Newsworthy developments such as a new product version.

Table 1 shows which of these possible subjects are appropriate for each type of publication.

**Table 1: Matching Subject Matter to Publication Type**

|                               | General Trade Press | Vertical Trade Press* | Local General Press | Local Business Press |
|-------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| Relationship Announcement     |                     |                       |                     |                      |
| Product/Solution Announcement |                     |                       |                     |                      |
| Case Studies                  |                     |                       |                     |                      |

Trends

Personalities

Key Milestones

\*Remember that to be appropriate for a vertical publication, an announcement must be the appropriate type, and must also relate to the market segment served by that publication (e.g., to be appropriate for a banking publication, a story must be about something of interest to bankers).

.3

### **Audience**

Your publicity may target one or more of the following audiences:

- Customers: By informing existing and potential customers of your latest products and solutions, you can help boost both awareness and sales.
- Employees: Keeping employees informed about your products and solutions not only helps them to be more effective in their jobs but also improves their morale.
- Potential employees: Publicity can also help your recruiting efforts by making potential employees aware of your company.
- Industry peers: By publicizing your products and solutions, you increase your company's stature in the industry.

Table 2 shows which of these possible subjects are appropriate for each type of publication.

**Table 2: Matching AUDIENCE to Publication Type**

| General | Vertical | Local   | Local    |
|---------|----------|---------|----------|
| Trade   | Trade    | General | Business |
| Press   | Press*   | Press   | Press    |

Customers

Employees

Industry Peers

\*See note to Table 1.

While national coverage is exciting and can gain broad visibility for your company and products, don't overlook the benefits of local publicity. Your local daily and business press are valuable sources of coverage for several reasons:

- Its easier to obtain coverage. Your local press is much more interested than the trade press in what is happening in your community. Consequently, they're much more likely to give you coverage. At the very least, you'll probably get a brief news story. In many cases, the reporter will find your story interesting enough to go into more detail — perhaps doing a personality profile on your CEO, a local business makes good success story, or a feature story covering some unusual aspect of your business.
- Your customers will read it. The readership of your local daily and business press includes many of your customers. Even if you do business nationally (or internationally), a certain percentage of your customer base lives in your area. A story in the local press will enhance your visibility with these customers.
- You may be able to leverage local coverage into national coverage. If a local paper finds your business interesting enough to do a feature story, you can send it out over a wire service and possibly gain much broader coverage. Interesting and unusual photos will further increase the likelihood of your story being picked up by other publications.

For local general press coverage, contact the business editor and technology editor; for coverage by the local business press, contact the technology editor.

## 5. KEY PUBLICITY VEHICLES

Several vehicles are available to you for getting the word out about your companys activities. These include:

### .1 **Press Release**

A written announcement of a newsworthy event, distributed to all appropriate members of the press at the same time. Distribution channels include the mail, a news wire service, and fax (generally used to supplement mailings in the case of selected key editors). Typical length is 23 pages; could be as long as 56 pages if subject is particularly significant. (See the Public Relations Quick Reference for an example.)

### .2 **Fact Sheet**

A brief document that outlines key points and facts about an announcement. Accompanies a press release if a solution is especially significant or innovative and cannot be adequately represented with just the one communication. A fact sheet provides an at-a-glance view of the announcement that enables editors and reporters to get a top-line understanding of complex technical information, numerous benefits, and other relevant information. Typical length is 13 pages. (See Public Relations Quick Reference for an example.)

### .3 **Article**

A more in-depth treatment of a news-worthy event, providing additional details. Typically submitted to a selected publication rather than distributed to multiple publications at once. Case studies, industry trend stories, and key company personalities are all appropriate subjects for articles. You may write the article yourself, under the byline of a key person in your company; or you may work with a reporter, who will interview you and write the article.

### .4 **Press Event**

A press gathering, usually held in conjunction with a trade show, at which you announce a subject of particular significance (e.g., a revolutionary solution that will have a major impact on an industry or market sector). Press events should be well thought out, both to ensure that key media people attend and to ensure that they get their moneys worth. If you waste the time of the press by inviting them to a non-event — for example, a relatively insignificant announcement — they wont be likely to attend future press events you hold.

**.5 Press Tour**

A series of person-to-person editorial visits. A press tour takes time to plan and is most effective when you're making a strategic announcement, such as a product launch. Often a company executive accompanied by a marketing/PR person will go on the tour. If you're doing a product demo, it's a good idea to bring along someone who knows the product well. It's best to set up visits at least two weeks ahead of time.

**.6 Media Advisory**

A brief written announcement of an event of interest to the press, such as a press event or seminar focusing on a new service or solution. Distributed to all appropriate members of the press at the same time.

## 6. GETTING THE MOST FROM YOUR PR

This section will help you write press releases that get noticed. Information covered includes:

- Writing tips
- Leveraging your relationship with suppliers and customers
- Format guidelines
- Timing guidelines

## 7. WRITING TIPS

### Writing Guidelines

An effective press release conforms to the following guidelines:

**.1 News Hook**

The news hook, conveyed through the headline and first, or lead, sentence, clarifies the news value of the story. (For more information on what constitutes a newsworthy subject, see *Selecting an Appropriate Subject in Publicity Fundamentals*.)

**.2 Factual, Objective Tone**

Unlike an ad or brochure, a press release must have a factual, objective tone and avoid hype. You must back up all claims with supporting data. Any statement that is not objectively verifiable must be attributed to someone via a direct or indirect quote.

**.3 Inverted Pyramid Structure**

Press releases should be structured to present the most important information first — a structure known as the inverted pyramid. When space is too limited to run your whole story, editors will cut from the end, so the inverted pyramid structure ensures that the most important elements of your story will be included.

**.4 Active Voice**

Your story will be more lively and interesting if you tell it in the active voice rather than the passive voice.

In the active voice, the entity doing the action precedes the action:

*Acme Corporation has developed a revolutionary solution ...*

In passive voice, the action precedes the entity who acted:

*A revolutionary solution has been developed by Acme Corporation ...*

**.5 Concise Presentation**

A press release provides an overview of your story — what is new about your product or solution, who can benefit, and pertinent technical details. Usually 23 pages is sufficient; occasionally, if the subject is particularly significant or

complex, you could go to 56 pages. But don't drown the reader in technical details; save the in-depth information for another vehicle, such as an article.

## **Press Release Elements**

A press release consists of the following elements:

- .1 Contact Information**  
Precedes the body of the press release; lists one or two people in your company that the press can contact if they want more information. Includes phone numbers as well as names.
- .2 Release Date**  
Precedes the body of the press release; either states For Immediate Release or specifies the date (and, in some cases, precise time) when the information can be released.
- .3 Head**  
A benefits-oriented headline that conveys the key elements of your story. Should be action oriented and attention grabbing.
- .4 Dateline**  
Immediately precedes the lead sentence; specifies the story's release location and date.
- .5 Lead sentence**  
The first sentence of the story, it tells the key elements of your story.
- .6 Opening paragraph(s)**  
Expands on the lead sentence to convey your entire story in one or two paragraphs, covering the five Ws (Who, What, When, Where, and Why) and explaining the key benefits. You should write your opening paragraph(s) in such a way that if the editor used that information and nothing else, the resulting article would still contain all key elements of your story.
- .7 Positioning Quote**  
Generally follows the opening paragraph; quotes a key member of your organization as to the significance of this announcement. This is your one

opportunity to use subjective information to position your announcement, explaining the impact you expect it to have on the industry or target market.

Here are some key points to keep in mind about the quote:

- **Make it meaty.** A quote should convey information, not be just empty words. For example, in a press release announcing your relationship with a key supplier, don't just say, "We are pleased to be teaming with Universal Products". Talk about how this will benefit your customers, or how it reflects current industry trends.
- **You can write it yourself.** Most of the quotes you see in press releases were never uttered by the person who is being quoted. When you write the quote, select an appropriate spokesperson from your company and write a quote that conveys the importance of your announcement. Then run it by the spokesperson to obtain his or her approval.
- **Make it sound spoken.** Spoken language differs significantly from written language. For example, spoken speech uses contractions and often involves shorter sentences than written language. Try saying your quote aloud. If it sounds awkward, rewrite it until it sounds like some-thing someone would actually say.

**.8 Technical Details**

Expand on the information in the opening paragraph(s) by providing more details. If you are covering several subjects, consider using subheads to break up the technical details section and make it easy to skim. For example, a release about a new software product might contain one section providing details on its execution speed, another describing its functionality, and a third on its ease of use.

**.9 Product Requirements, Pricing, and Availability**

Specifies minimum product requirements (if appropriate), price information (if desired), and when and where the product can be obtained (can include contact person and phone number if desired).

**.10 Boilerplate**

A standard paragraph that you use at the end of all your press releases presenting key facts about your company and explaining what business you're in.

## **8. LEVERAGING YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH SUPPLIERS & CUSTOMERS**

A major benefit of being a Microsoft Solution Provider is that it links your company in peoples minds with a strong, established corporation. Your relationship with Microsoft is therefore something you can refer to in public relations materials you create, whenever appropriate. However, its important to avoid overstating what your membership means, lest you accidentally mislead the press and the public.

To keep your relationship clear in print, refer to yourself as:

- A Microsoft Solution Provider.
- Part of the Microsoft Solution Provider Program.
- Accepted as a member of the Microsoft Solution Provider Program.

Do not refer to yourself as:

- Partner with Microsoft in the Solution Provider Program.
- Having a partnership with Microsoft.
- Authorized by Microsoft as part of the Solution Provider Program.
- Certified by Microsoft as part of the Solution Provider Program.

You may represent your organization as an Authorized Training Center or Authorized Support Center if it has been qualified by Microsoft as such. You may not represent your organization as being certified by Microsoft, since certification is awarded to individuals (rather than organizations). However, you can and should highlight the credentials of the Microsoft Certified Professionals within your organization.

Finally, it would also be inappropriate to link your name with Microsoft in such a way that implies a relationship other than the one that exists. If, for example, youve created a solution that uses Microsoft products, do not say Microsoft and Acme Corporation announce a revolutionary new legal spreadsheet! Rather, separate the entities so the roles are clear: Acme Corporation announces a revolutionary new legal spreadsheet based on Microsoft® Excel. This way, its clear to customers that your product has a strong link to a well-known, high-quality product without blurring any lines. And customers know to come to you to take advantage of that solution.

## 9. FORMAT GUIDELINES

Here are some guidelines to keep in mind when formatting your press release:

**.1 Double Spacing**

Use double spacing to make it easy for copy editors to mark up the text.

**.2 More, End**

All pages except the last should end with the word More. If the pages of the release become separated, this convention tells the editor whether this is the final page. For the same reason, the last page should end with End (or, alternatively, a series of # signs).

**.3 Identifying Header**

All pages except the first should start with a header identifying the subject of the release and the page number. Again, this convention helps the editor reassemble the release correctly in case the pages become separated.

**.4 Trademark Information**

As a courtesy to other companies, you should identify any trademarked terms with the proper trademark sign (® for registered trademarks; ™ for other trademarks), plus a footnote at the end of your release identifying the owner of each trademark. (If you're not sure which product names are trademarked, refer to that company's literature for guidance.)

## 10. TIMING GUIDELINES

The best time to mail your press release depends on whether the publication has a daily, weekly, or monthly publication schedule. Here are some general guidelines:

**.1 Dailies:**

Material should arrive at least a day in advance.

**.2 Weeklies:**

Material should arrive within two weeks of the desired publication date, and no later than one week in advance. For the trade press, material should arrive at least two weeks in advance.

**.3 Monthlies:**

Material should arrive at least two to three months in advance.

## 11. INDUSTRY PUBLICATIONS

This section:

- Identifies key publications for the computer industry.
- Provides profile information, target audience descriptions, and editorial contacts.
- Provides tips for compiling your own press list.

## 12. KEY COMPUTER PUBLICATIONS

### .1 Some important weekly and biweekly publications:

Computer Reseller News

Computerworld

Information Week

InfoWorld

PC Week

PC Magazine

### .2 Some important monthly publications:

Datamation

Reseller Management

Service News

VARBUSINESS

### .3 Some important vertical publications:

#### **Accounting**

Accounting Technology

Accounting Today

Journal of Accountancy

Management Accounting

Practical Accountant

#### **Banking**

ABA Banking Journal

American Banker

Bank Systems & Technology

US Banker

#### **Brokerage/Trading**

Institutional Investor  
Wall Street & Technology

### **Document Imaging/Management**

AIIM Inform  
Electronic Design  
Electronic Document Management Systems Journal  
EE Times  
Imaging  
Imaging World

### **Healthcare**

Computers in Healthcare  
Healthcare Informatics  
Hospitals & Health Networks  
Medical Economics  
Modern Healthcare

### **Insurance**

A.M. Best  
Insurance and Technology  
National Underwriter

### **Legal**

ABA Journal  
American Lawyer  
Law Office Computing  
National Law Journal

### **Manufacturing/Engineering**

Design Technologies  
Engineering News Record  
Managing Automation

Manufacturing Systems

**Pharmaceuticals**

Drug Information Association Journal

Pharmaceutical Executive

Pharmaceutical Technology

**Retail**

Retail Info Systems News

Retail Systems Alert

StoresNational Retail Federation Magazine

**Telecommunications**

Communications Week

Network World

Telephony

## 13. PROFILES, TARGET AUDIENCES, AND EDITORIAL CONTACTS

The following section provides profiles, target audience descriptions, and key editorial contacts for several key computer publications.

### .1 Computer Reseller News

Ed Sperling  
1054 Saratoga-Sunnyvale Road  
San Jose, CA 95129  
  
408/725-4300 ph  
408/252-9308 fax

*Computer Reseller News* is a weekly source of microcomputer industry news for resellers. The publication serves a wide range of resellers from VARs and VADs to more traditional members of the reseller community, such as dealers and retail stores. The publication aims at the high end of the reseller marketplace — owners, CEOs, principals of corporations, vice presidents, and general managers.

### .2 Information Week

John Soat  
6724 166th Way SE  
Issaquah, WA 98027  
  
206/957-0661 ph  
206/957-0662 fax

*Information Week* serves senior-level information managers in America's largest and most information-intensive organizations. The magazine targets information systems (IS) managers and information chiefs who make strategic decisions on information technology (IT) and whose IT budgets are in the multi-million-dollar range. Articles cover new products and technology, trends, and strategies for the efficient and effective use of information technology.

### .3 InfoWorld

Shawn Willet  
155 Bovet Road, Suite 800  
San Mateo, CA 94402  
  
415/572-7341 ph  
415/358-1269 fax

*InfoWorld* is a major news weekly dedicated to the desktop computer industry. It covers the entire industry for people involved in all areas of computing, particularly multiple-unit buyers of personal computer products. InfoWorld strives to provide comprehensive, timely, well-sourced, and accurate information on products, companies, trends, and technology.

**.4 PC Week**

Amy Cortese  
110 Marsh Drive, Suite 103  
Foster City, CA 94404  
415/378-5540 ph  
415/378-6849 fax

*PC Week* is the dominant news weekly covering the microcomputer industry as a whole for corporate computing, information systems, and data processing managers, end-users, and buyers. Their editors are known for their aggressive style.

The scope of *PC Week's* coverage extends beyond microcomputing to include general computing issues and hardware and software not strictly within the realm of the personal computer. News and feature articles emphasize analysis providing the story behind the news, as well as the news story itself. VARs and VADs make up 6 percent of the readership.

**.5 Reseller Management**

PO Box 650  
Morris Plains, NJ 07950  
201/292-5100 ph  
201/292-0783 fax

*Reseller Management's* mission is to provide profitable strategies for value-added resellers including VARs, systems integrators, software developers, and consultants. The magazine addresses problems these professionals face and provides solutions.

Every issue presents strategic profit-ability evaluations of markets and technology, as well as covering sales, marketing, personnel, operational, and financial management issues, with an eye toward helping value-added resellers increase their profitability.

**.6 VARBUSINESS**

Katherine Bull  
1054 Saratoga-Sunnyvale Road  
San Jose, CA 95129

408/725-4300 ph

408/252-9308 fax

*VARBUSINESS* is a monthly magazine that provides in-depth information on products, technology, VAR/VAD marketing programs, and their effects on the value-added reseller market. Typically, articles discuss how resellers can manage their business more profitably, and the pros and cons of various products and technologies. *VARBUSINESS* looks at new vertical market opportunities and analyzes important trends in the industry.

## 14. OTHER EDITORIAL CONTACTS

For other types of publications, use the following guidelines:

- **Vertical trade press:** Send materials to the technology editor.
- **Local general press:** Send materials to the business editor and technology editor.
- **Local business press:** Send materials to the technology editor.

## 15. HOW TO COMPILE A PRESS LIST

The library is your best resource for compiling a press list. Two media guides that you will find particularly helpful:

- **Bacons Publicity Checker:** For local, general business, and vertical trade publications.
- **Media Map:** For high-tech trade publications.

Make your list as broad as possible — include every publication that could reach any of your target audiences. But also develop a list of key editors at 10 (or fewer) publications that are really critical to the success of your publicity efforts — for example, the technology editors of your local daily general press and the editors of several key trade publications. These are the ones that you will contact by phone and fax as well as by mail.