

Excerpt from the chapter on *Press Releases...*

What editors want

I should warn anyone of a sensitive disposition to brace themselves before reading the next sentence. The fact is, journalists couldn't care less about you or your business. It may be your obsession, your passion, your calling in life – but it is not theirs and, not to put too fine a point on it, they wouldn't give you a glass of water if you and your business were on fire.

The only thing that interests them about you is how you can help *them*. And the only way you can do this is to give them:

A NEWSWORTHY STORY THAT THEIR READERS CARE ABOUT

Instead, to their immense frustration, they are hassled all day every day by small businesses giving them stories that are more suited to internal memos. This is because small businesses are utterly wrapped up in the inner workings of their burgeoning enterprise – and they assume everyone else is too. However, like holiday snaps, illnesses and children, other people's are never as interesting as your own. Unless, that is, they have wider appeal. A holiday snap of you on the beach with Elvis, a narcoleptic bus driver, a child that can predict the winner of the 3:15 at Kempton – now suddenly I'm interested.

The same is true with your business. Editors don't care about your

'2.3% increase in sales over the previous quarter'

but they do when you say that your products are being

'implemented across the NHS to eradicate hospital-acquired infection'

So stop thinking like a, whatever you are, and think like the person that will be reading your news story. What will interest them? That is what editors want. Step outside of your business and transform *your* story into *their* story.

How to create a news story from absolutely anything (even nothing)

So how can you be sure that yours is the kind of news story that will hit the headlines rather than the bin in the corner of the editor's office? Here I take three typically lacklustre starting points – promotional hype, a product release and (it doesn't get worse than this) absolutely nothing – and run each through a mechanism that will transform it into a real live bona fide news story.

How to create a news story from... Promotional Hype

Banal marketing clichés, such as *Great Low Prices*, *A Commitment To Quality*, *Exceptional Customer Service*, have been so overused that they have ceased to have any impact. Maybe for a fortnight in the late 1950s, we were bowled over by such bravado, but since then... nothing.

Fortunately, a newsworthy story can be fashioned from even the most insipid marketing hype. You just need to extract the interesting stuff that lies behind the promotional fluff. Here's how.

Great low prices!

Why are they so great? Look at the reason why the prices are so low and you will find the kind of story that could attract an editor's eye. Perhaps you have developed an innovative, cost-cutting method of production. Maybe you provide big discounts for special groups (the young, the elderly, the disabled and so on). Or, your enterprise might be run according to the Buddhist principle of doing good rather than maximising profit.

A commitment to quality!

How will this benefit your customer? Be specific. You know what you mean by 'quality' but no one else does unless you spell it out for them. A wine retailer, for example, may insist on only employing staff with a specialist knowledge and years of experience. An IT consultant might offer a free site survey before commencing work followed by a system check-up a month after completion to ensure everything is operating at optimum efficiency.

Exceptional customer service!

What do you do that your competitors do not? Using a word like 'exceptional' is a big claim, so you need to get across precisely how you go the extra mile for your customers. Do you literally go the extra mile, offering your service to customers no matter how remote they may be (could be a good angle for a mobile shop, pizza delivery or beautician)? Are you a curtain maker that not only measures up and fits the curtains, but brings sample fabrics round to customers' homes to discuss the different options?