



## Healthcare Marketing

### Do the right thing when it comes to your news releases

For thousands of reporters nationwide, 2000 may well go down as the year of the news releases - bad ones that is.

Reporters, particularly in the healthcare industry, have commented to fellow reporters, company executives and PR contacts alike, that rarely have they been bombarded with so many news releases filled with inconsequential announcements labeled as "news." There's even a website for reporters to post examples of bad news releases. Offices get painted a new color - send a release; upgrade software from 3.0 to 3.0.1 - send a release; add an automated answering service . . .

Reporters talk of jammed fax machines, receiving more than 100 news releases sent to e-mail inboxes PER DAY, answering machines filled with comments like "did you get our news release?" and more. Most often, reporters talk of how difficult it is to identify the real news that will be of interest and value to their audience.

Unfortunately, the rash of poor news releases hits at a time when there is also considerable real news in the healthcare industry. Innovations in products, new alliances, companies entering and leaving the marketplace, new studies and surveys and so on really are making a difference. Therefore, just as reporters comment on the quality of news releases, thousands of CEOs and marketing directors have also questioned, "Why didn't this get published, this was really news?"

In short, the year 2000 seems to have been one of greater than usual disconnect between reporters and organizations seeking coverage for what they believed were solid company announcements.

But all is not lost. And even the most jaded of reporters will admit that the standard company-issued news release can be a source of accurate and useful information. So what's the secret? Here's some suggestions compiled from a sampling of healthcare trade reporters:

1. Do your homework about media outlets that will receive your news release. What type of news do they cover? In what format? Some publications have a section devoted to industry news, but it may be only legislative or hard news that is included. Therefore, a new product upgrade would not be of interest. Likewise, some publications do not cover new personnel or awards. Don't send information on the new president or latest industry honor the company has received. Reporters and editors always appreciate and make note of news releases that take into account their specific focus and areas of interest.
2. Know the audience for the media outlet. If your news release is on receiving accreditation from NCQA or JCAHO, chances are the reporter at a healthcare technology publication will not be interested.
3. Go beyond your four walls. Just because a new product or service is important to your company, doesn't mean it will be important to others. Ask

- yourself, "Why would anyone else care about this? If I weren't at this company, would I care? What would make this important to someone outside our company?" Stress the value of the announcement to an audience beyond the four walls of the company - your customers, investors, and your industry as a whole.
4. Quantify and substantiate your claims. Reporters comment that this year there has been considerable hype, particularly in the area of e-health. Words like mission critical, seamless integration, revolutionary, etc. have become commonplace. If you make a claim, be ready to back it up. Better yet, have an independent third party or respected industry representative ready to support your statements as well.
  5. Send your release to the right people. Reporters also frequently comment on the waste of paper and time when multiple releases are sent to the same publication. Or when releases are sent to people who are no longer there. One reporter mentioned a public relations firm that kept sending releases to an editor who had been dead for three years. As one reporter admonished, "Save your postage: One news release to the right person." (Note: there may be more than one reporter at a publication interested, if so, let the editor know.)
  6. Be factual and honest. Don't claim that a product or service is "the first" unless you are absolutely sure that it is. When you refer to studies or statistics, site the source. Statistics can be a valuable component of a release and can help build a solid story. However, if there is no valid source for the stat, most reporters will not be comfortable including it in a story that they write.
  7. Remember your English teacher. Nothing turns a reporter off more quickly than a poorly written news release filled with typos and editing errors. We are all human and an occasional typographical error may happen, but multiple mistakes reflect poorly on the author of the release and on the organization. Also, watch the language and lingo used - write plainly and concisely - try to avoid the latest buzz phrases. For example, instead of saying "seamless," define exactly what the word means within the context of your sentence.
  8. Use the Internet appropriately. Firms today are increasingly using the Internet to distribute announcements in the form of a news release directly to customers, analysts, investors and other audiences. While the Internet is a tremendously valuable tool and a great way to directly communicate with these targets, sending promotional information over a news release distribution wire in the form of a news release may weaken the strength of your legitimate news. Think of a newsletter or personal note to a targeted mailing list instead. Or, if the release is more feature than news, ensure that it is clearly labeled as "feature" or "background."
  9. Understand a publication's deadlines. If you would like to see an article or story in a particular issue that comes out in January - don't send the release in January. Depending on deadlines, some monthly news magazines have deadlines two to three months prior. Likewise, if you send something six months in advance, don't be surprised if it is lost or forgotten.

If all these seem rather basic and common sense, that's the point. Writing an effective news release that understands the needs of busy reporters as well as the marketing potential of an effective PR program involves a variety of very simple steps. However, before sitting back and thinking, "we do the right things" or "we'd never do that" take a strong look at the information you are disseminating, at the language used and the reporters you send to and make sure that you are following

the basics.

Now is a busy time for all industries, and perhaps it has been a few months since a media list was reviewed. Or perhaps a release was sent out to appease upper management as opposed to sitting down and discussing whether or not an announcement was truly appropriate for a news release.

Not every release will get printed every time. Even some good, solid news releases may not get picked up due to a variety of factors. However, if you follow some basic steps, you'll have a much better chance of breaking through the clutter and getting your legitimate company news published.

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