

Module 6

This module will cover;

- How to develop relevant key messages
- How to write a media alert and a media release
- How to work with traditional media

Key Messages

Key messages are the specific things you need to tell your audience in order to change their awareness, attitude or behaviour. All PR strategies need to have one or two clear messages. These messages must be concise, clear and readily understood. A variety of secondary messages can be used to support the key messages.

If you are being interviewed or preparing for an interview and have answered all the journalist's questions but have still not communicated your key messages, your interview has failed. Look for opportunities to convey these messages throughout the interview process. If you are being interviewed on television or radio, make sure the messages are absolutely clear and easily understood, as you have one chance to convey them - they cannot be re-read as with print.

EXERCISE SIX (a): KEY MESSAGES

What is your key message?

What evidence supports these statements?

What does this mean to the audience?

Media Alert

A media alert is often sent to the media prior to an event or activity. The idea is to inform the media of an upcoming story so they diarise it for coverage on the day.

[Click here to view an example of a media alert](#)

Media Releases

Before you commence writing, the first rule is to study the media and make sure your article is relevant to their particular medium, otherwise you'll be wasting your time and theirs.

What makes an item newsworthy varies depending on time, place and one section of the media to another. News is something NEW, up-to-the-minute, unusual, sensational or something which affects many people and is, therefore, in the public interest. News value is also a flexible commodity.

The key is to keep it simple – your message has to be understood by the average person. When you are drafting a statement, imagine someone you know unassociated with the subject reading the text in front of you. Write for them.

[Click here to view an example of a media release](#)

Some points to remember when writing a news release:

- Use short sentences
- Use short paragraphs
- Use positive words and phrases

The first paragraph is the most important of the release and should contain the strongest point. If you don't get the journalist's attention in the first paragraph, it is more likely that they won't read on and your story may never be covered.

If you are releasing a report with a number of recommendations, the 'lead' may not be announcing the physical release of the report, but one of the more interesting recommendations.

The first paragraph should contain at least one of the following: What, Where, Why, How, When, Who (The five W's and a H)

After the lead introduction, each remaining paragraph of the release should be less important than the one which preceded it. This is called the inverted pyramid style. When the story is written this way it can be edited from the bottom up. Each paragraph should be self-contained and contain ONE idea.

The Spin

Resist the temptation to deliver more than one key message in a media release as this will severely weaken its impact. You can always include important secondary messages, but only to reinforce the key message.

Deciding upon the key message isn't always easy. Encourage a free-ranging creative discussion between everyone involved. Brainstorming will often lead to one key message and a list of supporting sub-messages. Once you agree on the message, it needs to be fine-tuned until it is clear, concise and to the point.

The news angle or spin, is the approach a journalist uses to present a story and capture the interest of the reader, viewer or listener. This not only makes the story more interesting; there are also practical reasons. Different news mediums often share the same consumer market, with similar information streams coming into their newsrooms. By expecting journalists to find different angles on this information, editors are able to package a product to suit their consumer market. It also means on slow days reporters stretch their imaginations and present insignificant news or information in an upbeat way to make it more interesting (in extreme cases this is called a beat up).

RULES:

- * stick with the facts
- * present those facts in the most interesting light possible



Other key points to remember:

- Mention the full name of the organisation early in the release-
- Attribute all statements to a particular person, or the organisation. The media are unable to use newsworthy assertions unless sourced.
- The media love "quotable quotes" -sayings or comments which stand out for their originality, simplicity, and strength
- Be original -do not use clichés (e.g. at this point in time, leave no stone unturned, etc)
- Keep the information simple and to the point
- End the release with two contact names, listing business and after house phone numbers should further information be required -remember journalists work unusual hours and may need to contact you after normal business hours
- Be sure to date the release clearly.
- Email content in the body of the email as well as in a PDF attachment.

Presentation Tips

- Make your headline catchy
- Spell out figures one to nine except in dates, times, prices, street numbers, weights and measures
- Do not use % sign in a sentence, spell out per cent
- Spell out abbreviations of the words street, avenue, boulevard and names of states to avoid confusion
- Type it one side of the paper only
- Use double spacing, with wide margins (it assist editors)
- Staple the release if it is more than one page
- Indicate more pages to follow at the bottom of each page and number the top of the following in case the release becomes detached
- Use a letterhead or type the name and address at the top of the release.
- Head it "News Release" or "Media Release"

Media Release Methodology

Include Heading "Media Release" and include your Organisation or Club's logo

Headline: Should be brief and to the point

Content: Should follow the methodology on the following page



Who, What, Where, When, Why, How

Quote from Source

2nd Paragraph supports
first Paragraph

Supporting
Information

Contacts

The end of a release should include information about the organization or club distributing the media release and key contacts for further information (include no more than two). ([click here for a 'Planning a media release' template](#)).

- stipulate timing, i.e. "For Immediate Release" or "Embargoed until Often the same set of facts can be written in a number of different ways depending on who you are targeting:

Spin 1: The straight news angle -the writer sticks to the facts; it is the most direct course and usually the best when writing a general media release particularly when there is a strong news angle.

Spin 2: The human interest angle -the writer adds a human dimension to an otherwise dry set of facts. If done in a media release, it is to give the journalist some ideas to work with in constructing a news story. Any 'real people' used must be genuine so they can be referred to.

Spin 3: Conflict angle -a topic involving conflict often works well for a news story; when writing a release but be careful not to be too emotive.

EXERCISE SIX (b):

Write the headline and at least the first two paragraphs of your release.

Now try and re-write the initial part of the release for a different audience and with a different spin.