

Getting Your News Noticed

Make sure you really have 'news' in your press release. You may think you've got a 'hot' story to share, but are you a journalist? Read the release out loud—does it read like a news story? Could you imagine reading the release that way in the paper or magazine you're targeting? If it doesn't read like a news story, go back to the drawing board and make it more interesting.

SEND E-MAIL, NOT SNAIL MAIL

1. **Be timely.** Send press release as soon as possible—the next day at the latest. Anything over a week old is too old for a daily news publication.
2. **Be specific in your subject line.** Help the reporter find your release among the hundreds other releases he gets each day. Which is more interesting?
 - Press Release
 - Press Release: People, Passion & Purpose at Rock Star FCU Annual Meeting
3. **Include press release in both the message box and as an attachment.** Press release should have city, state, date of release. Include caption in release with everyone in photo identified by name and title, front row first, left to right, followed by second row, left to right.
4. **Photos should be JPEG or TIF.** If you embed photos in a word document, be sure to include a JPEG or TIF of the photos as attachments. PDF files with both are acceptable. Avoid zip files since they can carry viruses.
5. **Double check your work:** Don't spell a name one way in the release text and another way in the caption. If you discover an error after you've sent the release, notify the news outlet immediately and tell what and where the correction is. Editors may have already processed your first version by the time they get the correction. Make sure you send the final draft, not the draft with all the red, blue and green tracking changes.
6. **Eliminate the italics and boldfaces for online press releases.** Editors have to remove these and insert codes instead.

WRITING SHOULD COMPEL, NOT BORE THE READERS

1. **Avoid these cliches:**
 - The credit union is excited or thrilled about the new alliance.
 - We look forward to working with the new board chairman, regulator, Congress, etc.
 - President/CEO Iva Gone is proud/happy/relieved/saddened to announce that he's resigning.
 - Avoid exclamation points!!!
2. **Jumping on the bandwagon? Be timely, say something different.** You see a story and say, "Oh, we did that too. Let's send a copycat release." By then, it's no longer news.
3. **Get to the point right away.** Don't bury your lead behind a lot of labels, titles, jargon, or less important information. The newest information—the "what happened"—goes up front. Avoid describing why, or history or background in the lead. (Don't write chronologically. Write from most important to least important.)
 - EXAMPLE:
 - a. **Not a Good Lead:** The Hele On FCU, a \$100 million not for profit financial cooperative serving Hawaii's pedestrians for over 50 years, will move its headquarters to another city next month.
 - b. **Better lead:** The Hele On FCU will move to Wikipiki City in July to accommodate increased foot traffic.
4. **Clean up the grammar.**
 - A credit union or organization is singular, not plural. Use "it" as the second-reference, not "their" or "our."
 - Do not write in "first person"—me, I, we, us, our. First person is acceptable only in a direct quotation.
 - Avoid the "he or she" clunkiness (Not: A member can add the program to his or her cellphone. But, yes: Members can add the program to their cellphone.)

5. **Keep it simple. Avoid throwing in everything you know about credit unions into the press release.** Stick with the issue that prompted you to write the press release.
 - If every release you write talks about
 - a. member owned, democratic cooperative structure;
 - b. better rates, low fees, better service;
 - c. how much money CUs saved consumers in your state;
 - d. how well CUs did last year compared with banks;
 - e. interchange;
 - f. small business lending;
 - g. thanking supporting congressmen and state officials for their support; and
 - h. announcing your new REAL Solutions program...
 - Too much information. Press release lacks focus. Use a fact sheet to handle some of this.
6. **Avoid soapbox speeches in your quotes that read like a lecture.** And never assume the reader agrees with you.
7. **Don't leave the reader wondering about missing info.** Give full information (i.e. the governor's full name, the lawmaker's party affiliation and district, the name of the committee holding the hearing, the next step expected, and why). In other words be complete about the Who, What, When, Where, Why and How in the release.
8. **Always have a person and a quotation in your release.** Some releases just have opinion statements with no person attributed.
9. **Make sure the quote you provide from your CEO or chairman does not merely repeat the news angle in the lead.**
 - EXAMPLE:
 - a. **The Lead:** The Wala`au FCU will offer three new programs for low income individuals, for students entering college and for young adults through its "Helping All, All the Time," reality program.
 - b. **The Quote:** "We're proud to offer our three new programs for low income people, students and young adults age 18-25 through our new program, which is called 'Helping All, All the Time,'" said Wala`au FCU President Phil N. Pause (This quote adds nothing to story and will get cut.)

HANDLING PHOTOS

1. Beware that certain photos will not be used:

- Blurry, out of focus or too dark photos;
- Photos of backs of heads in a conference where one can barely see the speaker
- Huge groups.
- Product/company logos.
- Inanimate objects.

2. Fully ID all the people in your photos, including people from other countries. By name, job position, name of CU and city. If it's a huge photo with 20 people, don't ID, but indicate who they are: a credit union's staff, a chapter delegation on a Hill hike, the 20 winners of the league's saving challenge.

3. Identify people from left to right, and front to back row. Not in order of who's most important.

4. Avoid starting a caption with a long list of names. Start with the action instead.

- EXAMPLE:
 - a. Shown with a \$1 million check presented to the Do-Gooder Society for the Underserved are, from left: John Doe, president/CEO of the Blah Blah League; Mary Jones, coordinator of the society; and James Smith, marketing specialist at the ABC Acronym FCU, Everywhere, Ohio.

5. Submit photos of people taking action and doing. Be sure everyone's face is visible. Get close to your subjects. Check lighting and backgrounds.

RULE OF THUMB:

Don't make your reader work. Anything that makes the reader stop reading means you lose the reader at that point. Do your job and the reader won't have to work.

EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRESS RELEASES:

1. SEUCU's Eighth Annual Shred Day is successful despite rain

MADISON, Wis. (6/10/10)--Shred Em Up CU volunteers braved the torrential rains on Saturday to help the Madison, Wis., community dispose of 94,000 pounds of sensitive documents. Eager residents waited in line at eight SEUCU branches to shred papers, helping them avoid being victims of ID theft, encouraging recycling and lessening the burden on the community's landfills.

(This was accompanied by a great photo of drenched, smiling workers at the event)

2. Debonnaire Pairs New Technologies for New Twist to Promote Annual Garage Sale Event: Media Takes Note

Debonnaire Community FCU forged new ground with publicity efforts for this year's community-wide garage sale in Madison, Wis. by pairing a Twitter feed with iSpot digital billboard technology.

To garner additional exposure for the garage sale event, which Debonnaire co-sponsors, credit union staff sent real-time message updates top display on Debonnaire's LAMAR-owned digital billboards via Web and mobile phone texting. The messages sent to the billboards highlighted featured items, some quite unique, of registered garage sale locations.

[[Note CEO's quote is specific.]] "Using Twitter and iSpot technology is allowing Debonnaire to bring the garage sale message to people in a new environment. Combining this technology with a more traditional promotional mix helps ensure our message about this worthwhile, community-focused event is received."

(Accompanied by photo of billboard with garage sale info and of garage sale)

3. It's Not Your Mama's Account!"

MADISON, Wis. (6/10/10)--VeryGood CU recently debuted its innovative new young adult account, "Not Your Mama's Account," a program designed specifically for those between the ages of 18-25. The new account, a first of its kind, features a unique bundling of financial and electronic services with immediate access to social media.