

MODUL PERKULIAHAN ELEARNING

MATA KULIAH - MCJ 301 - PENULISAN ADVERTORIAL

PERTEMUAN 10 – *ELEARNING*

***WRITING PUBLIC RELATIONS MATERIALS***

Dosen

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Bly., Robert W. 2005. *The Copywriter’s Handbook. A Step-by-Step Guide to Writing Copy that Sells*. 3rd edition. New York: An Owl Book Henry Holt and Company. Halaman 99–107.

**INTRODUCTION**

“Do you also write press releases?”

Although public relations is a different discipline than advertising, they overlap, and almost every copywriter is asked to write press releases or other public relations materials at some point.

To the copywriter trained in hard-sell persuasive writing, the soft-sell touch of PR writing takes some getting used to. Advertising reaches readers directly and makes a blatant, undisguised pitch to part them from their money. Press releases are sent to editors, not advertising departments, in the hopes that editors will publish them in their magazines or papers.

Once you send out a release, you have no control over when it will appear, in what form it will appear, or even whether it will appear. The editor can publish the release as is, rewrite it or cut it as he or she pleases, use it as the basis for a different story, or ignore it altogether. The editor has total control, and, unlike the publication’s advertising department, has no interest in helping you promote your firm.

The editor’s only concern is publishing a magazine or paper filled with news and information of interest to his readers. If your press release contains such news or information, the editor is likely to use it. If the release is just a warmed-over ad, the editor will recognize it as such and trash it.

Companies new to public relations ask the writer, “Do editors really use press releases?” The answer is that they do. The Columbia Journalism Review surveyed an issue of the Wall Street Journal to find out how many of the stories were generated by press releases. The survey revealed that 111 stories on the inside pages were taken from press releases, either word for word or paraphrased. In only 30 percent of these stories did reporters put in additional facts not contained in the original release.

There are no figures on how many press releases are generated each year, but writer’s guess is that it runs into the hundreds of thousands—maybe even the millions.

One reason why press releases are so popular is that they are inexpensive. To print a one-page release and mail it to a hundred editors costs less than $50. If an editor picks up your release and runs it as a short article in the magazine, your firm receives the space free. Running an ad of the same size could cost hundreds or even thousands of dollars.

What’s more, publicity is more credible than paid advertising. The public has a built-in skepticism for advertising but is trained to believe almost everything they read in the paper or hear on TV. They do not realize that most of the news they read and hear is generated by press releases—releases sent out by the same firms that run ads and commercials. But there is no guarantee that a press release will be picked up by the media or, once picked up, will generate much interest or new business.

Some releases are ignored; others generate spectacular results. When Leisure Time Ice, a trade association of ice manufacturers, sent out a press kit claiming that packaged ice is clearer and purer than homemade ice, the head of the association was interviewed by at least 25 editors and appeared on 15 radio and TV talk shows.

The Wall Street Journal, New York Times, Los Angeles Times, United Press International, and Associated Press all ran feature stories on Leisure Time Ice. The association’s membership increased by 10 percent. And sales of manufactured ice went up. More and more firms are using publicity to promote their products and services.

Even professionals who traditionally look down upon public relations—doctors, lawyers, architects, engineers, management consultants—are now writing releases, placing stories, and appearing on radio and TV talk shows: a survey of 523 members of the American Bar Association revealed that 20 percent of these lawyers use publicity to promote their practices.

**WHAT IS A PRESS RELEASE?**

A **press release** is a printed news story prepared by an organization and distributed to the media for the purpose of publicizing the organization’s products, services, or activities.

Here’s a sample of an effective release typed in the proper press-release format:

FROM: Kirsch Communications, 226 Seventh Street, Garden City, NY 11530

For more information please call: Len Kirsch, 516-555-4055

FOR: Pinwheel Systems, 404 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10016

Contact: John N. Schaedler, President, 212-555-5140

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**INTRODUCTORY KIT FOR NEW “RUFF-PROOFS” COLOR COMPS OFFERED BY PINWHEEL SYSTEMS**

A special Introductory Kit of watercolor dyes and other supplies which can be used with its new “Ruff-Proofs” do-it-yourself coloring system has been developed by Pinwheel Systems, New York, it was announced today by John N. Schaedler, president of the company.

Ruff-Proofs are latent-image prints made from black and white artwork. They can be transformed into multicolor art for layout and design comps, packaging, flip charts and other graphics, Schaedler said, merely by applying watercolor dyes or markers. (Patents are pending on the process.)

The prints are delivered in sets of four to give the artist an opportunity to experiment with different colors and explore varying color combinations. They are available from franchised Pinwheel Studios.

The Introductory Kit has a retail value of $45, Schaedler said, and is being offered to artists and designers for $20 with the purchase of Ruff-Proofs. It contains a complete set of coloring materials:

* A 36-bottle assortment of Dr. P. H. Martin’s Synchromatic Transparent Watercolor Dyes, with a swatch card of actual color chips.
* A 30-cup palette for mixing colors, squeeze-bottle dispensers for water and cleanup solution, plus absorbent tissues and cotton swabs used in the coloring process.

More information about the kits and the Ruff-Proofs process is available from John Schaedler at Pinwheel Systems, 404 Park Avenue South, New York, NY, telephone 212-555-5140.

Len Kirsch, author of the above release, gives these **12 tips on press-release format and content**.

1. What you say is more important than using fancy printed PR letterheads or layouts. Clarity and accuracy are critical.
2. When an outside public relations firm writes the release for you, its name and your own should appear as the sources for the release. If you wrote the release yourself, you become the source for more information. Either way, be sure to include names and phone numbers so the editor can get more information if needed.
3. The release can be dated with a release date or with the phrase “For Immediate Release.” Date the release one day in advance of the actual mailing to make it timely.
4. Leave as much space as possible between the release date and the headline (to give the editor room to write instructions for page layout).
5. The headline should sum up your story. Maximum length: two to three lines. This tells a busy editor, at a glance, if the story is worth considering.
6. The lead contains the “who, what, when, where, why, and how.” If the editor chops everything else, at least you’ve gotten the guts of your story across.
7. Include a person to be credited if there’s something worth quoting or if you make any claims. Editors don’t want to take the position they are claiming something—they’d rather hang it on you. The personal credits often get deleted, but it’s wise to put them in where needed.
8. The body of the story picks up the additional facts. Lay off the superlatives and complimentary adjectives. “We’re dealing with news space, not advertising where you can say anything you want as long as it isn’t indecent, immoral, or fattening,” says Len.
9. Length: Shoot for a single page, no more than two pages. Beyond that, reading becomes a burden for the editor. If you go to a second page, put the word more at the bottom of page 1 to let the editor know there is more to the story (in case the pages get separated). Put an abbreviated version of the headline (one or two words) and the page number in the upper left-hand corner of the second page.
10. When the reader might need it, include the name, address, and phone number of someone to contact for more information (this usually appears in the last paragraph of your story). Also indicate the end of the story by writing “—END—,” “###,” or “—30—” after the last line of the text.
11. If you use photos, type up a photo caption on a separate piece of paper and attach it to the back of the photo with transparent tape. Be sure to include your sources, contacts, and release date on the caption sheet.
12. Keep the release simple, straightforward, newsy. If you need only two paragraphs, don’t write ten. Excess verbiage turns editors off.

**YES, BUT IS IT NEWS?**

Editors look for press releases containing news. Like a good ad, the headline of the press release must instantly transmit the news to the reader. Editors are flooded with press releases and don’t have time to wade through your release and dig for the real story: Pamela Clark, formerly with

Popular Computing, once said her staff received 2,000 press releases a month. Your release must telegraph the news in the first five seconds of reading. But what **makes for a news story**? It depends on your industry and your audience. Forbes and Fortune would not consider publication of your new ball-bearing catalog to be news. But the editors of Machine Design, Design News, and other trade magazines whose readers use ball bearings might very well run a short news release on the catalog and a picture of its cover.

One thing that is not news is advertising and promotion. Editors will not publish descriptive stories about your product, service, or organization unless the story tells them something new, or provides service information useful to the publication’s readers.

A press release with the headline, “Ajax Dry Cleaners Provides Top-Quality Cleaning at Reasonable Prices” will probably not generate any coverage. But if Ajax sent out a release titled “Ajax Dry Cleaners Offers Expert Advice on How to Remove Tough Stains,” the editor of your local paper’s home section might reprint the advice as a how-to article. Ajax gets publicity by being listed as the source of the expert advice. (And Ajax can also use reprints of the article as flyers or direct mail.)

Here is a list of possible topics for news releases about your company. They all hold interest because they contain either news or useful information, or both. You can write a press release about:

1. A new product
2. An old product with a new name or package
3. A product improvement
4. A new version or model of an old product
5. An old product available in new materials, colors, or sizes
6. A new application of an old product
7. New accessories available for an old product
8. The publication of new or revised sales literature—brochures, catalogs, data sheets, surveys, reports, reprints, booklets
9. A speech or presentation given by an executive
10. An expert opinion on any subject
11. A controversial issue
12. New employees
13. Promotions within the firm
14. Awards and honors won by your organization or its employees
15. Original discoveries or innovations (such as patents)
16. New stores, branch offices, headquarters, facilities
17. New sales reps, distributors, agents
18. Major contracts awarded to your firm
19. Joint ventures
20. Management reorganization
21. Major achievements, such as number of products sold, increase in sales, quarterly earnings, safety record
22. Unusual people, products, ways of doing business
23. Case histories of successful applications, installations, projects
24. Tips and hints (“how-to” advice)
25. Change of company name, slogan, or logo
26. Opening of a new business
27. Special events such as a sale, party, open house, plant tour, contest, or sweepstakes
28. Charitable acts or other community relations

The only type of press release that does not need to contain news is the “background release,” or “backgrounder.” Backgrounders present a brief (three to five pages) overview of your company. They are not mailed alone but are included with other releases when editors want background information on your company. Even though the backgrounder is not, strictly speaking, a news story, you should try to put something new, or at least some little-known fact or startling piece of information in the backgrounders you write. This will grab an editor’s interest more strongly than a bland summary of your organizational chart.

Another special type of press release is the “fact sheet.” Fact sheets contain detailed information, usually in list form, too lengthy to be included in the body of the main release.

A press release announcing the opening of a new gourmet food store might be mailed with a fact sheet listing recipes for three or four of the store’s specialties. A fact sheet for a consulting firm could contain a list of clients or brief biographies of the firm’s principals.

Often copywriters are faced with a client who wants publicity and asks us to write a press release, but has nothing new to report. In such instances, a creative publicist or copywriter can “manufacture” a hook or angle strong enough to gain the media’s attention.

For instance, when Jericho Communications, a New York City PR firm, was looking for a way to gain publicity for their client Domino’s Pizza, someone said, “When we work late at night, we order pizza. Maybe the White House does the same thing. Can we see whether pizza deliveries to the White House increase when there is a national emergency?” Sure enough, they did. And Jericho created the “Pizza Meter,” publicizing the fact that you could judge the state of the nation by the volume of pizza delivery to the White House. The tactic was successful, garnering major media coverage for the pizza maker.

When gigapets were the rage, writer’s seven-year-old son dropped his into the toilet, and was upset that it “died” (the water shorted out the electronics). To make him feel better, we buried the gigapet in our backyard and held a mock funeral, which gave me an idea for some PR.

Writer sent out the press release below, and within a week, a major New Jersey newspaper did a large feature article on our “gigapet cemetery”

FROM: Microchip Gardens, 174 Holland Avenue, New Milford, NJ 07646

CONTACT: Bob Bly, phone 201-385-1220

For immediate release

**MICROCHIP GARDENS, WORLD’S FIRST “GIGAPET CEMETERY,” OPENS IN NORTHERN NJ**

When 7-year-old Alex Bly’s gigapet died after he dropped it in the toilet, he couldn’t find a place to bury it. So his father, NJ-based entrepreneur Bob Bly, created Microchip Gardens—the world’s first gigapet cemetery—in the family’s suburban backyard.

Now if your child’s gigapet dies and can’t be revived, instead of unceremoniously tossing it in the trash, you can give it a proper burial in a beautiful, tree-lined resting place.

For fees starting at $5, based on plot location and method of interment (burial, mausoleum, cremation), Bly will give your dearly departed gigapet an eternal resting place in Microchip Gardens, complete with funeral service and burial certificate.

“Even gigapets don’t last forever,” said Bly. “There are pet cemeteries for dogs and cats; now gigapets have one, too.” To help owners get the most pleasure from gigapet ownership, Bly—author of 35 published books including The “I Hate Kathie Lee Gifford” Book (Kensington) and The Ultimate Unauthorized Star Trek Quiz Book (HarperCollins)—has written an informative new booklet,

The booklet covers such topics as purchasing your first gigapet; taking the pet home; care and feeding; and play and discipline. Gigapet burial rituals and the origins of Microchip Gardens are also covered.

To get your copy of “Raising Your Gigapet,” which includes complete information on the Microchip Gardens gigapet cemetery, send $4 to: CTC, 22 E. Quackenbush Avenue, Dumont, NJ 07628.

**WRITING A FEATURE ARTICLE**

Copywriters also get called upon to “ghostwrite” full-length feature stories for trade and business publications. Take a look at a bunch of trade journals. They contain many articles written by outside contributors: scientists, engineers, managers, and other professionals employed by companies.

These contributors write not for pay (most trade journals pay a small honorarium or nothing at all) but to promote their own careers as well as the companies they work for. Many companies have a regular scheduled program of placing feature articles in magazines. And they hire professional writers to ghostwrite these articles.

Although each article is different, there are **four basic types of articles** that magazines publish:

1. **Case Histories**. A case history article is a product “success story.” It tells the story of how a product, service, or system was helpful to a specific customer. “Case history reporting derives its effectiveness from the principle that what works for one customer might work for others,” explains Jim Hayes, a writer-photographer specializing in case histories. “Case histories are effective, too, because they’re credible. They deal in specifics rather than in claims or generalities. Finally, case histories are an inherently storytelling approach to selling.” Here’s how a typical case history article gets started: A telephone manufacturer installs a new office phone system in a sales office. The office manager finds that the new system has increased the productivity of the sales force 25 percent and cut phone bills in half. When the telephone manufacturer gets wind of this, he asks the office manager if he can write up this success story and place it with an appropriate trade journal. If the office manager agrees, the telephone manufacturer hires a writer. The writer interviews the office manager at the sales firm and writes the story. After it is approved, it is submitted to the magazine and published. The byline may be that of the manufacturer, the office manager, or the writer. It depends on the nature of the article.
2. **How-to Articles**. These provide useful information that helps the reader do something better (“How to Choose the Right Computer for Your Small Business,” “Seven Ways to Cut Energy Costs,” “A Guide to Ball-Bearing Selection”). How-to articles are also known as “tutorials,” perhaps because they tutor the reader in a new skill or area of knowledge. The how-to article does not discuss your product directly (your company shouldn’t even be mentioned, except in the byline). Instead, it promotes you indirectly by establishing your firm’s reputation as a leader in the field. Readers tend to clip and save how-to articles. So, although your article may not generate immediate business, people will keep it for years and call on you when the need arises.
3. **Issue Articles**. In issue articles, industry experts speak out on some topical, controversial, or technical issue of the day. These articles help strengthen your company’s image as a leader in its field. Example: “Should Internet Users be Prosecuted for Illegal Downloading of Movies, Music, and Other Copyrighted Materials?”
4. **News**. News articles are usually prepared by staff editors and reporters, not outsiders. Occasionally, though, a corporation with big news to report—a merger, an acquisition, a revolutionary new invention—will work with a reporter to develop a feature story. The reporter gets a scoop, while the company gets good press.