

# ScotsBulletin

Your news, shared

**The PR alchemist's handbook** – Helping you  
craft the perfect media release



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## Welcome

MEDIA releases (aka press releases) are issued in their hundreds every day.

Everyone is doing it because, to have one's release picked up by a media outlet or shared via social media, is likely to result in a publicity dividend that is far in excess of the effort that went into producing it in the first place.

And it is safe to assume that - by taking out a subscription that allows you to post your releases on this site - you already know this.

You will know also that, to gain a foothold in anybody's consciousness, you need to be producing content and lots of it... so that you can be found by online search engines, shared via social media and known to busy journalists who are being asked to turn around more in less time.

To command attention, your story needs to be either irresistible or told in a way that is sufficiently compelling.

Our pledge to you: the tools you are about to be given will set you apart from the competition.

This training is partly about your writing skills and partly about the mechanics of uploading your release on to the site.

Welcome aboard.



THANKS for purchasing a media release posting subscription.

You will be now wanting to make best use of it.

Read on, to find out...

How best to tell your story

How to instantly grab the attention of your target readership

How to upload a release on to the site

How to forward your release to the likes of your local newspaper and radio station (using our media mailing list), including on an embargoed basis

How to produce a release that is stylistically consistent with the content elsewhere on the site

How to craft an effective headline

How to avoid the disappointment of producing a release that may require to be amended by the site moderators or deleted (our simple rule of thumb: releases on this site are only about self-promotion)

How to help develop the site's services

## Chapter one – Grabbing people’s attention

A MEDIA release is a bid for attention.

And since we are all busy people, it is necessary for media releases to be immediately arresting; at the risk of being ignored.

In blunt terms, it comes down to the first few words. Fail to engage at that point and, chances are, you fail to engage, at all.

So, here’s a suggested formula, if you like, with the reasons why, following...

It is: target audience + some sort of verb (should be, are to be, could be, etc) + the story as it applies to the target audience (perhaps an anticipated or actual impact).

For example: Fans of French cinema are to be treated to a rare public appearance by one of the legends of the ‘silver screen’.

Common alternative starts to a media release are often either background information or self-congratulation, neither of which are likely to grab anyone’s attention (and, indeed, could be positively alienating).

Background information such as a date or that a survey has taken place; self-congratulation such as a namecheck (not least a name that barely anyone will know).

Background and namechecks are, of course, important to a story but they are unlikely to be most important. Their place is further down the story, albeit perhaps as high as paragraph two.



Let us revisit the example opening paragraph, above, where the target audience is fans of French cinema.

By keeping the opening paragraph (deliberately) light on detail means it has a teasing quality (which will hopefully intrigue prospective readers, not push them away).

And it also helps set up the remainder of the release, making it relatively easy to write.

Because all the so-called 'five W questions' require now to be answered.

Who, what, where, why and when?

Who is this 'legend' of French cinema?

What exactly is the story?

Why is this legend making this so-called 'rare appearance' (indeed, why are her or his appearances usually 'rare')?

Where is this 'rare appearance' taking place?

When?

The writing of a media release becomes quick when the opening paragraph tees up the questions that require to be answered.

But it is all about the beginning, for the rest of the release to stand any chance of being read.

It has to be about the target audience; it cannot be about yourself.

## Chapter two – Think ‘impact’

LET us consider the previous chapter via a slightly different perspective.

Whatever it is that you wish to share as a story - whether annual results, the appointment of a new member of staff, the launch of a new product or service, etc, etc - there is likely to be an impact (actual or anticipated) as it affects at least one of your possible target audiences.



It is important to think, ‘impact’, when writing your story, just as it is to think ‘target audience’. They are clearly interlinked.

Whether ‘impact’ or ‘target audience’, this thinking begins to remove you from one particular constituency: yourself.

Harsh though it may sound, but very few people - relatively-speaking - are terribly interested in you. In fact, if they have never encountered you before, or have forgotten, then they may be positively alienated by a media release that makes a big play of your name.

All of us - give or take - asks of any story: So what? Who cares? What’s it got to do with me?

We are all sceptical and mostly will only engage with a story if it ‘speaks to us’, at a personal level.

So, the story - for example - is not about the opening of a health centre, per se. It’s about its impact (actual or anticipated) on the health of people, perhaps a particular group of people.

Of course, some stories almost write themselves, such is their extraordinary nature.

For instance, it's not unusual someone being awarded a black belt in a martial art, until you learn that this person is aged 93.

But extraordinary stories tend, by definition, to be few and far between.

Most stories are mostly fairly dull and therefore require a little 'magic dust' sprinkled across them, and that is best served by seeking to engage with one's target audience(s) by thinking 'impact'.

Otherwise, you risk being just another organisation that few people will have heard of, perhaps even indulging in potentially rather tacky self-congratulation.

## Chapter three – Separating yourself from the competition

BUT you are going to protest, yes? You are going to look at the media release landscape and point to a different formula to that suggested above.

This different formula is: someone doing something, at some time, somewhere.

It is commonly-used. This writer, at least, isn't sure why.

For one thing, it feels like an opening paragraph packed full of information, so potentially more leaden than light.

It is also an opening paragraph that is potentially full of information that is more off-putting than engaging.

Ask yourself how interested you might be in a story were it to involve names you have never heard of, numbers that feel remote or complicated, a date that seems irrelevant and a location that means nothing more than a word on a map.

Check out too how professional journalists construct their stories. Pick up a newspaper and consider how the opening paragraphs of many news stories tend to be short, punchy, light on detail and presuming little prior knowledge.

This is, of course, not an exact science.

But check too, how the second and third paragraphs (and perhaps, even, beyond) tend to be the opening paragraph repeated but re-worded - with information being steadily threaded out.



You may note too an absence of words such as 'following' or 'despite' as the start of any news story by a journalist.

Translated, a media release beginning with the word, 'following', screams that the story is going to begin with background. And a release beginning with the word, 'despite', suggests not just upcoming background but potentially convoluted intellectual gymnastics.

Background requires to appear where background should go: down the story, not at the start.

## Chapter four – The five Ws

TO some extent, it all comes down to the so-called ‘five Ws of journalism’.

Who, what, where, why and when?

This training argues that these are largely avoided within the opening paragraph of a media release - because to do so would risk producing relatively leaden and off-putting prose.



Instead, it proposes they begin making their appearance from the second paragraph onwards.

Which isn't really that much of a sacrifice, surely?

The suggested formula within this training, to remind you, is: target audience + some sort of verb (should be, are to be, could be, etc) + the story as it applies to the target audience (perhaps an anticipated or actual impact).

For instance: Fans of French cinema are to be treated to a rare public appearance by one of the legends of the 'silver screen'.

You are forcing your own hand. The tease obliges you to answer questions that you, yourself, have raised.

Who, what, where, why and when?

But imagine, too, how writing the remainder of the release, from paragraph two onwards, should become relatively straightforward.

And quick. Almost on auto-pilot.

You don't want to be finding yourself spending very long on a release.

You are a busy person, as we all are.

## Chapter five – The overall architecture

THESE last few chapters have been about the dozen or so words that will make up your opening paragraph.

If this chapter feels like overkill, it really isn't, and for one very simple reason.

Whether your media release is being considered by a journalist or by a member of the general public, they are going to be making a very snap decision.

A decision measured in fractions of a second.

It's what almost all of us do when confronted with a story, just as we make snap decisions about all the flood of information and messages that confront us, each and every day.

In truth, by recognising how time is of the essence, this training goes so far as urging most care with the first two or three words of your release; recommending they comprise the actual target audience you most want to be reading your story.

Now, let's assume your opening paragraph has been a success; that there are readers who have reached as far as the second paragraph.

You now have a further responsibility towards them.

It is simply this: the more important the information, the higher up the release it should go.



Paragraph ten, say, is no place to be sharing a jewel, because you will be effectively hiding it.

So, your release tapers, in its hierarchy of information.

If there is to be a quote inserted, and it is kind of expected, then we are talking circa paragraph five.

Written, usually, in the form: Said [name, job title]: “Put the quote within double marks, not single, and have it teed up with a colon (:) and place the full stop inside, not outside, the outer double marks.

“And if there are further paragraphs in the quote, you begin each paragraph with double marks - to continue the quote.

“But you only place the outer double marks at the end of the final paragraph of the quote.”

Again, go back to your newspapers. See how the pros do it.

Including how it is possible to take a story and begin cutting it from the bottom up, only to find the sense of the story continues to remain coherent and logical.

## Chapter six – The headline, timing, etc

EVERY media release requires contact details.

It is part of the expected overall construction, which also includes the headline and the release date and time.

We probably all enjoy the newspaper headlines that are rich in puns. But it's okay for the rest of us to pen something more prosaic.



In so doing, be aware that your target audience might well be searching online for a particular word or phrase and that you would like nothing better than your release to be found.

So, it's probably going to be a headline that is effectively a pithier version of your opening paragraph, mindful of what might be searched for online, by your target audience.

But remember, too: Twitter. A headline that is longer than the 140 characters risks being a headline that is too long to tweet.

The architecture of a media release also requires a decision as to when your release goes live.

If it is to be a later date and time, a very common convention is 00.01 - one minute past midnight of the day you want the release to go live.

## Chapter seven – ‘House style’

THIS site comprises media releases from lots of different folk.

For obvious reasons, we require to ensure there is a consistency of style across the whole site.

All releases are moderated ahead of publication.

This means looking out for possible spelling and grammatical errors. This means also looking out for anything that might contravene our T&Cs, regarding decency, criticism of third parties (not permissible, not least on the grounds of being unable to provide a right of reply), etc, etc.

And it also means making sure there is compliance with our ‘house style’.

That means a headline where the only capital letters are the first letter and any others that are part of proper names.

That means the first word of the release (or first two, if the first word is a single letter) being all-capped.

That means lower case for the likes of job titles, e.g. chief executive, not Chief Executive.

That means numbers one, two, three... ten, not 1, 2, 3... 10. But 11, 12, 13... 999, 1,000, 1,001, not eleven, twelve, thirteen... 999, 1000, 1001.

That means just the one space between sentences, not more.

That means no need to indent paragraphs, as you might if handwriting a letter.

That means English-English, not US-English: so ‘recognisable’, not ‘recognizable’.



That means symbols such as & and % written out in full; i.e. per cent / and.

It is a house style that reflects many operated by our best-known newspapers (which they might well appreciate, if considering whether to use your release).

The less our own moderators have to amend your release - so that it complies with our house style and T&Cs - the speedier that process will be and the less prone your release will be to moderating errors.

## Chapter eight – Just to remind you

THE successful ‘PR alchemist’ knows how to turn relative base metal into gold.

Knows too that, while namechecks and detail are vital ingredients, they are perhaps not as vital as one might initially assume.

That it really is about the target audience and reaching out to them. Realising they are human beings, with human needs, fears, dreams, etc.

And not much time, to spend deciding whether to read your story or not.

And that thinking ‘target audience’ and ‘impact’ can be also a practical tool towards generating story ideas on a regular basis. Instead of waiting for story ideas to come along - perhaps as part of a fairly empty diary - you can keep constantly asking yourself what - among your target audience’s needs, expectations, etc - might you be able to meet.

It’s a very creative, and potentially energising, process.

Content may be ‘king’. But the successful PR alchemist recognises that, in this increasingly busy and congested world of ours, they too have to keep busy; that constant content is probably even more the ‘king’.



## Chapter nine – Posting your release on the site

SO, that's the words, then. Now to the posting.

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As mentioned already, all content on the site appears only after having first undergone moderation.

In other words, when you submit your release, there will be a delay, as your release awaits moderation - usually only during office hours, Monday-Friday, 0930-1630.

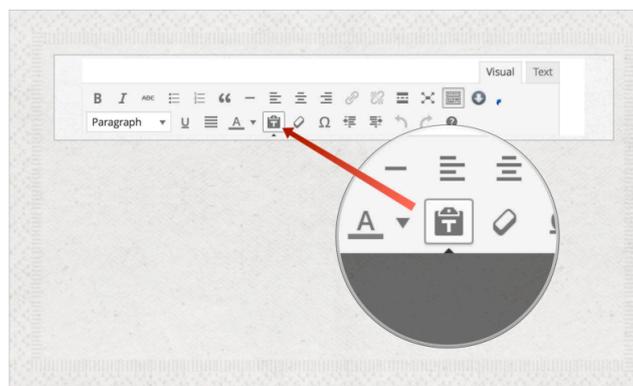
Submitting means completing a template, broken into a series of fields, beginning with the name of the posting organisation - that will be you, not any client.

The template appears when the system recognises you have at least one valid media release posting credit and when you click on the upload invite in the dropdown list found in the Media Releases block on the main menu bar.

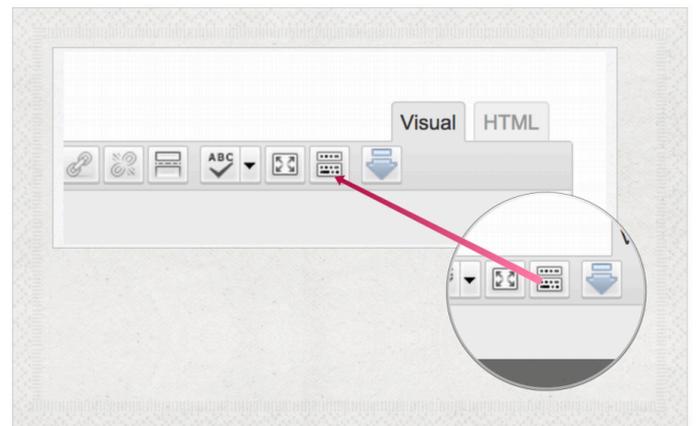
You are asked also to enter your media release headline. Keep the words, 'Media Release:', already in situ.

And, as previously stated, please do keep your headline almost all lower case (except the first letter and capital letters required in any proper name).

The body of your release has a field, of course, all to itself. And if you are pasting something already prepared, it is best to upload it via the T icon (T for text) that is found among the several icons displayed in the editorial toolbox, sitting just above the body copy field.



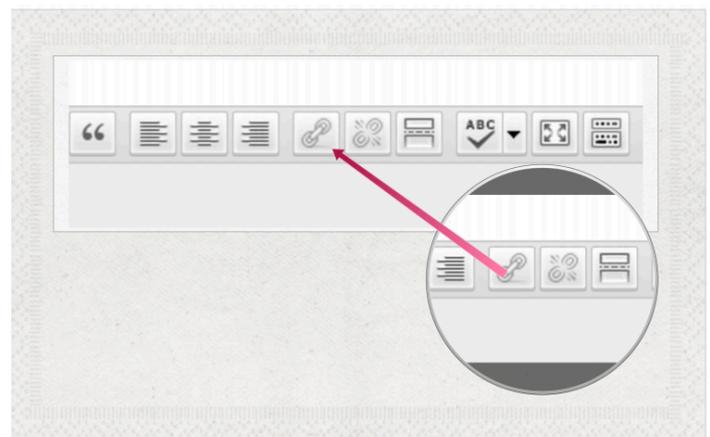
You might not initially find the T icon. It's on the second row of icons. If only one row is showing (probably because of the browser you are using), then click the 'toolbar toggle' icon, second from the right on that single row.



Pasting via the T icon helps clean out potentially awkward formatting.

And among the other icons on display in the toolbox, you might have reason to use the chain link one, that allows you to hotlink directly to a website or an email address.

It would be - for instance - only good manners for you to hotlink to any survey, awards competition or regulations you might be citing, to save your readers the hassle of having to search themselves.



Simply highlight - with your cursor - the letters or words you require to hotlink. For a website, add your www immediately after the <http://>, already in situ.

For an email address, however, replace <http://> with <mailto:> and have your email address immediately following.

The broken link icon of course undoes a hotlink.

When it comes to uploading an image, you will either have one (ideally, 800 pixels wide, 450 tall, in jpeg format and no more than 1MB in size) or you won't.

If you don't, don't worry: we have one that we would upload on your behalf.

If you would prefer to use an image that you, yourself, have sourced, then you need to be 100 per cent sure the copyright holder has given permission for its use on the site. Copyright abuse is a serious issue and can lead to legal and costly action (against you and you alone).

Whether it's our holding image or an image you have sourced yourself, you require to confirm that permission has been granted by the copyright holder for its use on the site (yes, of course, we have permission for the image we can use on your behalf).

With that done and after having chosen your subject (from the menu on offer) and the geography (ditto), you then require to select the date and time when you wish the release to go live on the site (keyboard shortcut: to quickly reach your exact time, type the hour and the clock will automatically leap there).

And then you are met with a question to answer.

Do you wish to forward your release to the likes of local newspapers and TV?

In other words: Do you want to directly alert the media to your release, in addition to having it appearing on the site and being read by the site's own substantial audience?

Should you answer, 'yes', then you are then asked a second question: If there is circa 24 hours before your release appearing live on the site (at the date and time of your choosing), do you wish your chosen media to receive the release, in advance 'under embargo' (with us warning it is under embargo, so that you don't need to).

Under embargo? Well, by providing your chosen media a 'sneak preview' it can allow them a little time to 'breathe', to schedule, to perhaps undertake a little additional work.

For instance, embargoes are commonly used to save having to work over the weekend (issue Friday, for use on the Monday). Or over Christmas (issue December 23 for use on Boxing Day).

But embargoes do get broken, including by accident. So, you must recognise - and adapt, accordingly - the worst case scenario were your

release to be published by a media outlet, ahead of when you wanted it to.

We are talking about your 'chosen media'. Simply saying yes to the first question does not result in the media being alerted. There is no facility for the 'blanket forwarding' of a media release.

Instead, you require to proactively open whatever geography and subjects lists that might be presented to you - in blue lettering - and then further proactively tick the outlets you wish to be alerted of your release, either as it goes live on the site (because you have said 'no' to the second question) or on an embargoed basis (because you have said 'yes' to the second question).

Choose wisely. You don't want to be potentially annoying a media outlet with a release you know is likely to be irrelevant to them. Tick the boxes only of those outlets that are realistically going to be interested.

And then it's simply about your contact details, before you consider hitting the submit button.

Before you do hit 'submit', best to do a final check of your release - for accuracy and how it appears in the template.

That's because there is no facility to edit your release once it has been submitted, beyond contacting the site directly and hoping a moderator is available (which they might not be) to deal immediately with your request.

Once it has been submitted, it's been submitted.

## Chapter ten – Be part of our community

AND finally... feel free to engage and share with us.

If, for instance, you have media outlets that you would like to see featured in our media outlets forwarding list, then do let us know. Nowadays, for example, there can be bloggers, not on everyone's radar, that command their own substantial audiences.



Also, please do share your stories via your own social media (we operate several twitter feeds, both subject and geography-related, to help spread the word).

And maybe other people's stories too. It might appear initially counter-intuitive, you sharing a media release posted by another organisation. But the ultimate aim of this site is to be read by as many people as possible, so that it becomes part of people's everyday news consumption habits.

As it is, the site is optimised for Google News. But there's no harm helping it to grow organically, in terms of its search rankings, by having its contents shared as widely as possible.

We can all contribute towards that happening.

Please do recommend us to others.

And if you would like to be financially rewarded for recommendations that result in a purchase, then check out our 'affiliate' programme, details of which can be found on the top menu bar on the site's front page.

Good luck in your endeavours!