



# Hitting the Headlines.

7 key questions you  
**MUST** answer **BEFORE**  
you write a press release

---

Greg Simpson



Written by [Greg Simpson](#), former business journalist,  
published author on PR and founder of [Press For Attention PR](#)

# So you want a to write an effective press release?

This free report will give you a simple and easy structure to use to create a story that makes sense and with the right ingredients, will make the headlines.

Before we crack on with the content, why should you listen to me? Well, I'm a former business journalist and a published author on PR.

I've also had the privilege of interviewing hundreds of business owners, including the PR master himself, Sir Richard Branson, when I chaired a press conference for him a few years back.

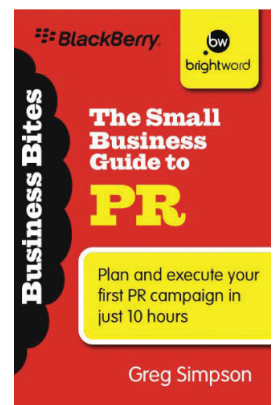
## Yes, he IS that nice in real life

The humble press release is the cornerstone of any public relations campaign. It communicates exactly what you are trying to get across simply, quickly and effectively.

Whilst this report will give you the edge on your next story, please remember that great PR is about key messages reinforced over time.

Ad hoc efforts are understandable but to really make an impact it is best to devise a full campaign.

That said, let's crack on.





# Keep it simple

People worry that their efforts don't sound flashy enough to warrant attention but you aren't aiming for a Booker Prize, you are aiming for coherent and interesting NEWS. I've banged on before about this and I'm afraid it is crucial.

If the story isn't **new** then it just isn't **news** and falls at the first hurdle.

**Structure - the crucial 6 questions. Number 7 to be revealed later...**

Use **"Who, What, Where, When, Why and How?"** as a framework and imagine yourself as the journalist. Is this definitely of interest to **their** readers? Is it simple enough to understand?

Does it stand up on its own? I stick to 300 words maximum and try and be even more brief if possible. Keep the press release focussed on the story/news angle.

Don't be tempted to waffle about the business in general or about the way it is run unless that is the angle.

You need to keep everything as succinct as possible.

You can add all of the "about us" and company history stuff in an editor's notes section after the press release with your captioned photos. See a note on that in the format tips below.

# Hit them between the eyes

Journalists get hundreds of press releases every day and are not going to scan through trying to find something of relevance. I prefer to call the journalist beforehand to outline my story and refine it for their audience. This helps iron out any creases and demonstrates that you are trying to work with them and with their audience in mind.



## Don't be tempted to start hassling

Some PRs will disagree but NEVER chase a journalist once you have sent it. If it is good enough, they will use it. Hassling will not push it to the top of the pile and may see it heading towards the recycle bin. Be patient and able to help if the journalist does come back and don't go on holiday the day after you have sent a story out.

## Hooked on news

If you do lack "news" all is not lost. You may be able to find a "hook" by providing relevant insight or commentary on a current trend or topic.

Ever wonder why familiar faces crop up in features in magazines or on the radio? It is because they are ready and reliable sources and they come through.

# Build a relationship

PR is not a "them v us" war with journalists, it is a working relationship where both parties stand to gain. They get insight and/or news, you get free publicity in exchange for a fresh take on things or for your role in illustrating an issue.

## Some mercifully BRIEF thoughts on layout/format

Keep it simple and keep it relevant. I use Microsoft Word purely because I know everyone can open it. It is also easy for a journalist under pressure to quickly copy, paste and then edit the story in their own files.

Some people like to have logos plastered all over the press release or watermarked onto the background. That is fine if it helps you to communicate your brand and can look nice if you host your files as PDFs on your website, but don't expect them to excite the journalist.

You need to make things as easy as possible for them to get to the heart of the story quickly

– clever formatting should be secondary to simplicity and getting the story across. I send the press release in two ways simultaneously.

First, I format the main press release with all of the logos that are required for my client's branding guidelines and save that as a Word file, complete with pictures and notes to editors on the bottom after the article itself is finished.

I signify this with a simple ENDS message.

If I have got the message over succinctly, I should now have space on the bottom of the first page for a simple 'ctd/...'



This is just in case the journalist wants to print off my press release and helps to mitigate the risk of losing a vital page. I also space the text throughout at 1.5. Again, this is something of a throwback to when press releases were hard copy and printed off – it leaves room for annotations, question marks or points that a journalist would like to follow up or query.

More and more frequently of course we are starting to include links to websites and extra resources in our press releases, especially if distributing the story online or expecting it to be published online. I would encourage this where appropriate but, again, do remember that a journalist is under no obligation to use these links (or have time to look at them) – this is editorial, not an advert.

On page 2, I detail who the journalist should contact for more information – in my case it's me (telephone number and email address) and then my client or my client's marketing contact.

This is just in case for some reason I cannot take the call or I am out of the office when a journalist calls –normally it isn't urgent but I like to have this failsafe just in case there is a deadline looming and the journalist needs more information.

On this page I also include the pictures that I want to use for the story. Don't insert them at their full size. Have two versions – one at print quality resolution (300 dpi) and one at a lower resolution that doesn't create a mammoth Word file.

Caption the pictures left to right to make it easy for the journalist to work out who is who.

Finally, include any notes to editors that you may have, perhaps weaving in your key messages and a little history about the company. This is just to give a bit of extra background for any journalist that may not know anything about your organisation.

Remember, if you are going to send a story out then be available to answer further questions if the journalist comes back to you needing more info! This is not a trap, they may just need to clarify an important point. Think of the press release as knocking on the door and sliding a note underneath – your message should contain everything the journalist needs to crack on with the story but she might want to pop round and ask a few more questions. Don't be afraid to answer if she does!

Whatever news hook or angle you are working on, more often than not, a journalist will ask for a press release so take the time to get confident about producing them. It really isn't good enough to get off the phone to an excited editor and then send them a link to a website where they can find out more – they don't have the time and won't thank you for the extra work.

**Finally, question number 7...  
trust me, this is the BIG one  
that makes all the difference...**

## **SO WHAT?**

That's right. So what? Great, you've got some news. Bully for you but what has actually changed? You need to crystal clear on what changes for the reader or for you now that the news is out.

Preferably BOTH.

Remember, the journalist isn't there to push your products or messages for you. He or she is there to inform and entertain the audience. Your task is to ensure that your story does just that.

I hope that this report has given you food for thought and some structure to your next or even your first press release.

If you want more advice, sign up to my FREE newsletter [HERE](#) or for a free chat about your next PR campaign, email me directly on [greg@pressforattention.com](mailto:greg@pressforattention.com)

If you want more detailed advice on creating your first PR campaign, check out my book '[The Small Business Guide To PR](#)'

### **Here's to making the headlines!**

Best regards,

Greg

PS that's me on the left, next to Sir Richard!

