

National Journal Communications Council

**Media
University**

AMU 421: Digital Friendly Media Relations

Updating the Press Release

April 24, 2015

The Press Release Has Come a Long Way

Press Releases Evolved from Tool for Briefing Journalists to Capturing Broad Audience Engagement

Charting Key Moments in Post-Internet Press Release Development

Late-1990s

Significant Milestones

Organizations begin to establish websites, creating an audience beyond journalists for press release engagement

Infographics (first used by USA Today) become conduit for sharing press releases with emphasis on data and statistics

Shift Communications (a public relations agency) pioneers the first “social media” press release

PitchEngine created to fill need for a platform distribution channel that handled more diverse use cases and tapped into latest distribution technologies

Vatican begins to experiment with using text messages for press releases, a practice still used to this day

Shift Communications updates social media release to take advantage of Twitter age, need for brevity in all communications

Facebook issues press release in haiku form, illustrating extent of potential experimentation with press release delivery

Noteworthy Illustrations

1. Shift Focuses on Shareable Content



- ✓ Creating independently sharable pieces of content (audio, images, etc.)
- ✓ Limiting number of characters in headline (suggested max: 55)
- ✓ Incorporating video where possible
- ✓ Linking to social media with plug-ins
- ✓ Leveraging back-end analytics to determine consumer base

2. Facebook Gets Creative

Upon hitting 1 billion users, Facebook used creative writing and the language of the internet to send a unique message:

*One billion users!
What's next for Mark Zuckerberg?
Pwn mobile and search.*

Present-Day

Google Makes its Mark on Press Release Distribution

Recent Strategic Changes to Google SEO Algorithms Profoundly Impact Reach and Content of Press Releases

Watching the Pendulum Swing in Two Years

2013: *Google made it difficult for organizations to “game the system...” by punishing press releases with algorithmic changes*

Rationale in Focus

- Minimize value of press releases in SEO
- Did not consider press releases equivalent to “news”
- Overly promotional press releases blacklisted as spam
- Should have an inborn audience associated with release versus being used to create an audience
- Meant to force organizations to produce more useful and informative content versus material meant to drive traffic and filled with buzzy keywords

2015: *Google opened up its algorithm to place organizational press releases on same footing as journalists’ news content*

Rationale in Focus

- Allow organizations to be viewed on equal footing as preferred news sites and syndicates
- Levels playing field so that institutions can compete for views
- Designed to let users “get to the right answer” faster than ever before
- Could potentially hurt news outlets that once relied on Google’s preferential treatment
- Signals evolution of organizations’ strategy away from content Google would have blocked two years ago (now more legitimate purveyors of content)

In Their Own Words

“There is a difference between content marketing and SEO: while the first can service the second, and certainly a good SEO strategy will necessitate content, the primary goal of content marketing as a discipline is to engage your community. **The press release is one of the earliest forms of content marketing as we know it – and as such – any press release that is done primarily for SEO purposes is just bad PR...**Google did the press release a favor.” – Leslie Nuccio, Senior Content Marketing Strategist, *Meltwater Group*

A Tried and True Formula

Essential Press Release Content Remains Relatively Unchanged Over Time



Giving Proven Content a Multimedia Makeover

Next Generation Press Releases Make Use of Key Online Features While Staying True to Journalistic Roots

Topic-Centric Title

- ✓ Headline leads with the issue—not with the organization
- ✓ Sub-title appropriately mentions role of the release sender

Facts and Figures

- ✓ Links provide context without overloading readers with too many options
- ✓ Leads with data and statistics—increasingly necessary for data-driven audiences and journalists

PRESS RELEASES f 204 30 8 66

AMERICAN CRAFT BEER EXPORTS NEAR \$100 MILLION

Small and Independent American Brewers Flourish in International Markets

Boulder, CO - March 24, 2015—The Brewers Association (BA)—the not-for-profit trade group representing small and independent craft brewers—today reported export growth data for the American craft beer industry in 2014. Supported by the BA's Export Development Program (EDP), craft beer export volume increased by 35.7 percent in 2014, representing 383,422 barrels and an estimated \$99.7 million.

In 2014, the fastest growing markets were Brazil, South Korea, Thailand and the United Kingdom. The strongest growth was found in Brazil, which was up 63.9 percent; Asia-Pacific region (excluding Japan), up 38.1 percent; Western Europe, up 36.6 percent; Canada, up 32.3 percent; and Japan, up 31.7 percent.

The top five markets for American craft beer remained nearly the same in 2014, with South Korea surpassing Japan for fifth place. In terms of market share, Canada accounted for 53 percent of exports, Sweden for 12 percent, the United Kingdom for 10.7 percent, Australia for 5.1 percent, and Korea for 3.4 percent.



**BA EXPORT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM
GROWTH 2013-2014**

32% CANADA 37% WESTERN EUROPE 32% JAPAN

64% BRAZIL 38% ASIA PACIFIC

TOTAL EXPORT GROWTH: 36%
(All figures refer to growth by volume)

Download high resolution graphic 

Social Sharing

- ✓ Variety of options for channels appeals to broader audience
- ✓ Social proof visible in the current numbers of shares per channel

Multiple Visuals

- ✓ Visual elements in releases can elevate views by up to 92 percent, according to *PR Newswire*
- ✓ Multiple pieces of media increase views by up to 552 percent, per the same study

May I Have Your Attention, Please

Too Much of a Curiosity Gap in Release Headlines Harms Potential Coverage and Engagement



Common Headline Approach



The Offending Headline



The Unanswered Question(s)



The New and Improved

The “Empty Celebration”

America’s Beverage Companies Mark Earth Day and Aim to Boost Fuel Economy Further

How is the industry marking Earth Day?

This Earth Day Marks Double-Digit Increase in Fuel Economy Since 2010 for America’s Beverage Industry

The “Statement-Without-A-Statement”

NPA Chief Scientist Comments on Research Associating Dietary Supplements with Increased Cancer Risk

What are his comments? Does he agree or disagree?

Link Between Dietary Supplements and Cancer Risk Unfounded, Based on Researcher Bias

The “We’ve Got Findings to Share”

Benchmark Study Yields Key Insights Into Global Organic Food Trade

What are these key insights?

Global Demand for U.S.-Grown Organic Means Missed Opportunities for American Farmers

“Jargon Bingo”

NADCO: As Budget Advances, SBA 504 Program Back at Zero Subsidy

???

After Saving Thousands of Small Business Owners During Recession, SBA Loan Program Will Again Be Self-Sustaining

A Good Quote is Hard to Come By

Understanding What Passes the Publication Test Can Inform Writing Choices

What We Say...



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

WASHINGTON, April 15, 2015 --

Through enough Seaboard Detroit sizes a

“On the heels of organic sales now nearing a milestone 5 percent share of the total food market, organic stakeholders have gathered in Washington to educate lawmakers and policymakers. Our latest industry data show robust demand and great opportunity for the organic sector,” said Laura Batcha, CEO and Executive Director of OTA. *“OTA’s consumer survey has already found that organic doesn’t have any demographic boundaries; this additional new data prove it doesn’t have regional or partisan boundaries.”*

- ✓ Comprehensive
 - ✓ Technical
 - ✓ Careful
-
- ✓ Watered-down

...and What Readers Ultimately See

AP

Consumers buying more organic products despite high prices

WASHINGTON (AP) — The price of organic foods and other products doesn’t seem to be



Organic Trade Association unveils promising stats on industry growth

WASHINGTON, April 15, 2015 - The Organic Trade

“Our survey shows organic has turned a corner,” said OTA’s Batcha.

“The only way to create change is for there to be widespread adoption,” Batcha said.

- ✓ Short
 - ✓ Colloquial
 - ✓ Provocative
-
- ✓ Memorable

Writing a More Potent Quotable

Putting the Right Words in Someone Else's Mouth Isn't as Hard as it Sometimes Seems



Adding Commentary

Quotes should provide context and opinion, while answering questions of "why?" or "so what?"

WASHINGTON, April 2, 2015/PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- Jeffrey D. Neverman, CIC, CPIA, of Neverman Insurance Agency in Westlake, Ohio, has been named the 2015 Professional Agent of the Year by the National Association of Professional Insurance Agents (PIA).

"This award is PIA's highest honor," said PIA National President Richard A. Clements. "It recognizes the achievements of one Professional Insurance Agent who is an outstanding member of PIA."

"Jeff Neverman is the epitome of what an agent should be," Clements said. "He started his own agency 35 years ago, and has built it into a **very successful and highly respected operation**. He did this, all **while still devoting himself to his family, his community and his fellow agents.**"

Restating the Facts

Quotes are not a vehicle for sharing essential details, definitions or other explanatory information



Telling, Not Showing

Quotes should answer "how do we know?" when highlighting accomplishments; ask better questions to arrive at anecdotes that demonstrate rather than describe



Rule of Thumb

- ✓ Remove quotation marks from the quote.
- ✓ If it still sounds appropriate coming from the organization's voice, it shouldn't be a quote.

It's All in the Frame

Creative Contextualization of Data Can Provide a Spark for an Otherwise Standard Release

Presenting Recurring Data ...

December Transit Savings Report: Public Transit Gives Many Benefits to Riders During the Season of Holiday Giving

Washington, D.C. As you plan your gift giving to friends and family members during the holiday season, remember riding public transportation helps to provide you a gift of savings. Riding public transit could save you money on driving but also helps you avoid the headache of congested roads during the holiday season. This month the average annual savings for public transit riders is \$1,355, according to the 2012 Census of Public Transportation Ridership and the American Public Transportation Association (APTA). These savings are based on the use of commuting to public transportation compared to the use of driving and driving a vehicle which includes the December 8, 2014 average retail gasoline price (\$3.01 per gallon, reported by AAA), and the national unemployment benefit program rate (5.1%). APTA releases the monthly Transit Savings Reports to examine how an individual in a metropolitan household can save money by taking public transportation and being self-sufficient.

The national savings for a monthly, unreserved parking space in a downtown business district is \$168.26, according to the 2012 Census of International Parking Data Study which is the most recent report available. Over the course of your commute for a vehicle an annual cost average of \$1,095. The top 12 cities with the highest public transit ridership are ranked in order of their transit savings based on the purchase of a monthly public transit pass. The average annual transit pass price for December 8, 2014 is \$97.14 based on the most recently announced pricing.

City	Monthly	Annual
1 New York	\$1,355	\$16,263
2 San Francisco	\$1,199	\$14,390
3 Boston	\$1,195	\$14,345
4 Philadelphia	\$1,112	\$13,348
5 Chicago	\$1,098	\$13,177
6 Honolulu	\$1,096	\$13,151
7 Seattle	\$1,096	\$13,150
8 Los Angeles	\$1,039	\$12,467
9 Portland	\$993	\$11,914
10 San Diego	\$991	\$11,893
11 Minneapolis	\$980	\$11,756
12 Denver	\$971	\$11,648

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“December Transit Savings Report: Public Transit Gives Many Benefits to Riders During the Season of Holiday Giving” (American Public Transportation Association)

...Or Giving It New Meaning

Which billionaire could buy your city?

by Tammy Unger | June 8, 2014

Bill Gates Could Buy All 114,212 Homes in Boston, but Couldn't Afford Seattle; the Walton Family of Wal-Mart Could Buy All of Seattle, Dallas, Miami, Las Vegas or Washington, D.C.

Just how rich is Bill Gates? According to Forbes, he's the world's richest person and is worth \$77.5 billion. But that kind of wealth is hard to wrap your head around, so let's put it another way. Gates could buy every single home in the entire city of Boston. That's 114,212 single-family homes, condos and townhouses, at a total purchase price of \$76.8 billion.

Given that the average American struggles to afford a home, we wanted to illustrate just how many homes the wealthiest among us could buy. Here's a table of some of the billionaires on the *Forbes 400 Wealthiest list*, each paired with a city that billionaire could hypothetically buy. For the sake of this illustration, we assumed that wealthy families, such as the Waltons of Wal-Mart and the Koch brothers, would pool their money if they were going to purchase an entire city.

Billionaire / Wealth Source / Net Worth	City / # of Homes / Cost of All Homes
Walton Family Wal-Mart \$154.8 billion	Seattle, WA 241,450 homes \$111.5 billion
Koch Brothers Oil \$86.0 billion	Atlanta, GA 286,629 homes \$78.1 billion
Bill Gates Microsoft \$77.5 billion	Boston, MA 114,212 homes \$76.8 billion
Warren Buffett Berkshire Hathaway \$63.5 billion	Charlotte, NC 260,214 homes \$56.1 billion
Michael Bloomberg Bloomberg LP \$31.4 billion	Anaheim, CA 69,167 homes \$31.4 billion
Larry Page Google \$30.8 billion	Boca Raton, FL 99,964 homes \$29.5 billion
Jeff Bezos Amazon.com \$29.5 billion	Napa, CA 57,923 homes \$29.5 billion
Mark Zuckerberg Facebook \$27.7 billion	Saint Paul, MN 139,124 homes \$26.8 billion



“Which Billionaire Could Buy Your City?” (Redfin)

- ✓ Contextualizes data points in unexpected ways
- ✓ Allows for broader appeal and application among audiences
- ✓ Lends itself to a more visual treatment

An Exercise in Re-Framing, Illustrated

Organizations Can Leverage New Media Tools to Creatively Illustrate Compelling Data Sets

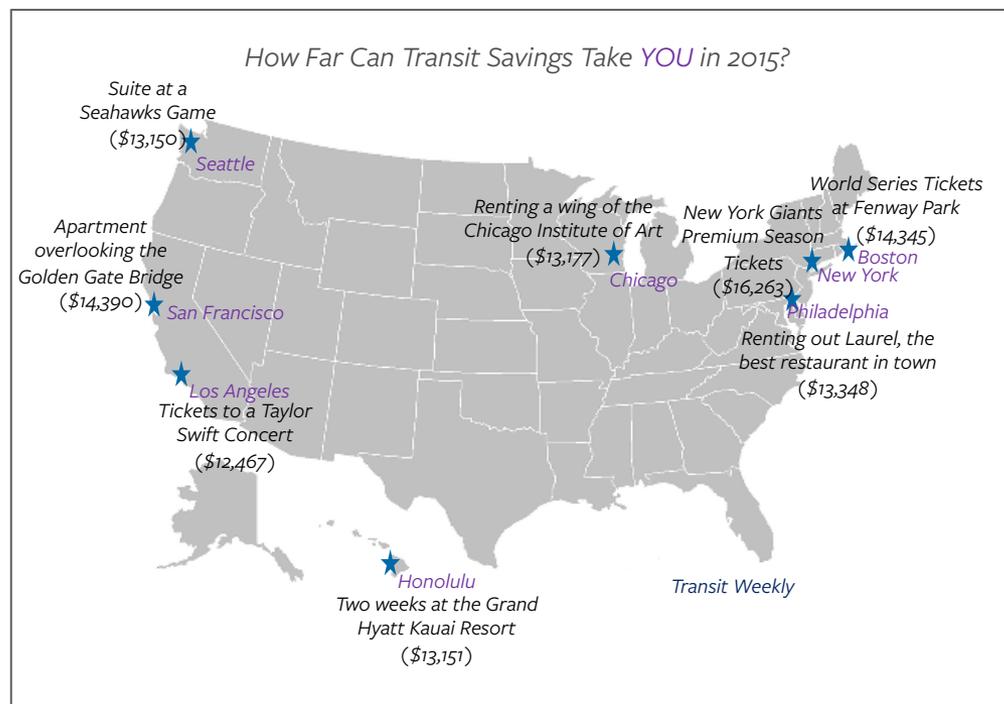
Take the Tried and True List...

...and Breathe New Life Into its Delivery

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Washington, D.C. As you plan your gift giving to friends and family members during this holiday season, remember riding public transportation helps by providing you a gift of savings. Riding on local public transit instead of only taxis can bring you the best bang for your buck. The American Public Transportation Association (APTA) December Transit Savings Report indicates that the public transportation instead of driving can save you, on average, more than \$137 per month. These savings are based on the cost of commuting to public transportation compared to the cost of owning and driving a vehicle which includes the December 3, 2013 average national gas price (\$3.49 per gallon reported by AAA), and the national consumer monthly vehicle lease payment. APTA releases this monthly Transit Savings Report to measure how an individual in a two-person household can save money by using public transportation and living with carpooling. The national average for a monthly unreserved parking space in a downtown business district is \$46.85, according to the 2012 Cities International Parking Data Study, which is the most recent report available. Over the course of a year, saving costs for a vehicle are estimated at an average \$12,676. The top 20 cities with the highest public transit ridership are listed in order of their transit savings based on the purchase of a monthly public transit pass. The savings are based on total gas prices for December 3, 2013 and the local monthly consumer parking rate.

City	Monthly	Annual
1 New York	\$1,285	\$14,820
2 San Francisco	\$1,180	\$14,160
3 Boston	\$1,185	\$14,220
4 Philadelphia	\$1,112	\$13,344
5 Chicago	\$1,200	\$13,177
6 Honolulu	\$1,200	\$13,171
7 Seattle	\$1,200	\$13,102
8 Los Angeles	\$1,039	\$12,467
9 Portland	\$993	\$11,914
10 San Diego	\$991	\$11,892
11 Minneapolis	\$990	\$11,796
12 Denver	\$971	\$11,648



“December Transit Savings Report: Public Transit Gives Many Benefits to Riders During the Season of Holiday Giving”
(American Public Transportation Association)

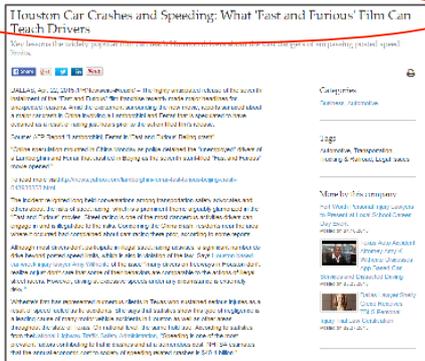
Re-Envisioning the Press Release as a Call-to-Action

Hybrid Press Releases Recognize Opportunities to Spark Active Participation and Sharable Moments

Compelling Calls-to-Action Take on Diverse Forms...

Eye-Catching and Educational Subject Line

Links to Immersive Content and Emphasis on Social Media Engagement



...And Missed Chances to Promote Calls-to-Action Are Easily Fixable

Room for Growth



Eberstein & Witherite LLP press release, "Houston Car Crashes and Speeding: What 'Fast and Furious' Film Can Teach Drivers"

Hi-Tech Development Zone press release, "Chinese Province Quickly Becoming the Next Major Hub for Overseas Biopharmaceutical and High Tech Development"

American Trucking Association press release, "ATA to Host Press Briefing on Trucking's Priorities"

- Subject line emphasizes teachable elements of press release and opportunity to influence reader behavior
- Content leverages popular, well-known phenomenon (i.e., "Fast and Furious" movies) to grab attention
- Press release helpfully summarizes key points with bullets which also graphically set summary apart from main body of release

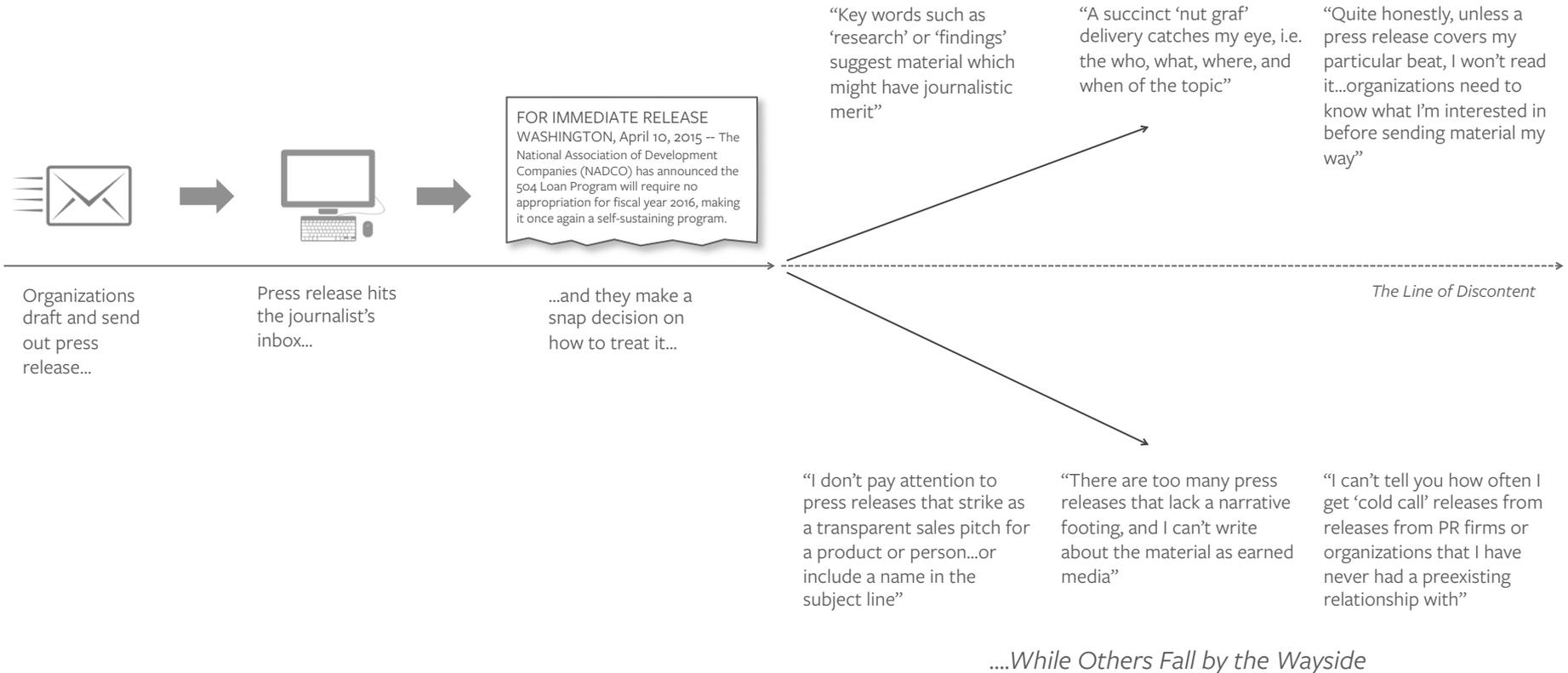
- Press release almost overemphasizes the sharable elements, using hashtags and links to connect material back to a broader community of followers
- Key event (e.g., business development webinar) highlighted in red font and linked from press release
- Subject line could be more succinct, but meat of press release is extremely detailed and accentuated by compelling images

- Subject line could be more descriptive and emotionally resonant to capture reader attention, noting why the event matters (e.g., "ATA Senior Leaders to Emphasize Renewable Energy and Higher Salaries as Key Themes of 'Future of Trucking' Summit")
- Basic details provided but release does not use platform to advance other potentially compelling components of event (e.g., speaker backgrounds, location, attendees) or maximize social media engagement

Feedback From the Editors' Desk

Journalists Waste No Time in Marking Many Press Releases as Spam

The Press Release Life Cycle



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AMU 421: Digital Friendly Media Relations

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