

## Writing effective press releases

The press release can be the most cost-effective marketing tool at your disposal – it costs little to create and distribute, but can have a huge impact if your story is picked up. The press release can form the basis of editorial coverage, which is regarded by audiences as a lot more credible than advertising messages. It also gives you control over the message, ensures the facts are correct, and can be effectively targeted to publications, journalists and other stakeholders.

An effective release will need to be structured in a way that makes it clear and easy for a journalist to develop into a story.

Once you have written a press release, it is then sent to a relevant journalist. If they see a valuable story in the release, they will submit it to the editor. If they, in turn see a story there, then it will likely go back to the journalist to create the story.

To help ensure your release is picked up, consider the following:  
Is it news?

The press release is the first step in generating media coverage, but many releases fail to get any coverage – often because the subject or announcement doesn't meet simple tests for newsworthiness.

### Before you begin, check that your announcement is:

- **Current:** news media rely on breaking stories. Something that happened a week ago is no longer news.
- **Significant:** is the subject of the release something big that you can see in the media – a first, milestone, If not then it's probably not newsworthy.

- **Relevant:** think about the audience of the media channel you are giving the release to. Is the subject relevant and of interest to them? At the end of the day most media outlets are a commercial business and need to keep their customers satisfied.
- **Local:** the closer the story to home, the more newsworthy it is.
- **Prominent:** famous people get more coverage. Links to existing fame can help generate newsworthiness.
- **Human interest:** generally a human interest story can ignore these guidelines, but instead must appeal to emotion, which can be a lot harder to get into a press release.

### Structure your release

An editor can see dozens of press releases in a given day. To help your release make the cut, it is important that you structure it in a way that clearly outlines what your announcement is, why it is relevant to their readers, and is easy to transform into a story.

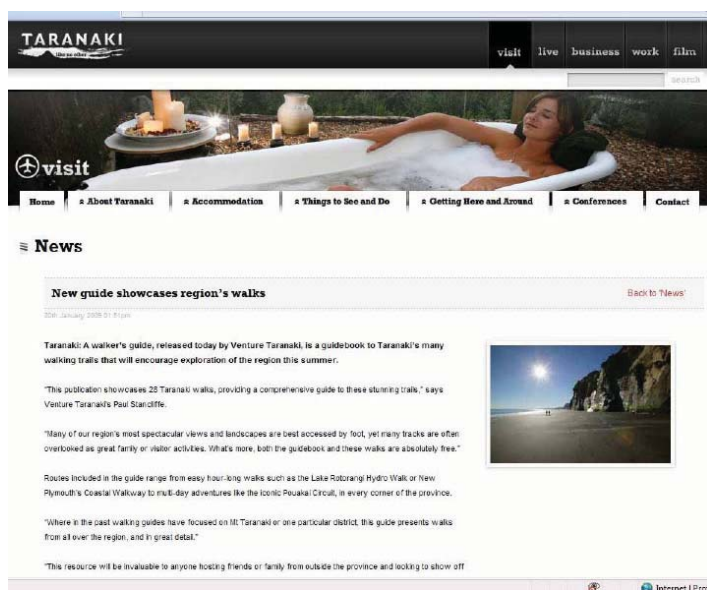


Photo: Rob Tucker

## Some useful tips:

- **Identify it as a press release:** If you're emailing include it in the subject line of the email. If you're faxing or hand delivering, make sure it's written on the page.
- **Include the date:** It's hard to be current news otherwise.
- **Use a catchy title:** This is a hook for an editor to read further.
- **The first sentence counts:** An uneducated reader should be able to get the whole point of the release by reading just the first sentence.
- **Use your company name:** In full, as early in the release as you can.
- **Less is more:** Use short, concise sentences and paragraphs, and if possible keep the whole release to one page.
- **Language matters:** Make sure your release uses positive and active language.
- **Quotes:** include simple strong quotes. Be sure to attribute them to a specific person and organisation.
- **Double check:** Make sure you cover: What, Where, Why, How, When and Who.
- **Spelling:** Make sure you spell check, and get someone fresh to look over it before you hit send.
- **Include contact details:** phone, cellphone, email, web and physical.

## Include photographs

Some media outlets will be able to use your photographs in their publication, so it is worth making good quality high-resolution photographs available. Photos should be:

- **Relevant to the story.**
- **Action based.**
- **People based.**
- **Uncluttered and close-up with easily identifiable faces and places.** A good tip is to always use the flash, even outside.
- **Between 1 megabyte and 2 megabyte in size.** Much higher will make processing difficult – instead have higher-resolution versions available on request

## Distributing your media release

Once you have crafted your press release (and proof read it), it's time to get it out there.

It is worth developing a media contact list. Every time

you see an article on a business, product, idea, or service similar to yours, take note of the writer. Generally their name will appear in the by-line of the article, and increasingly their email addresses are included. Look at the websites or even phone the publication to get appropriate contact details if necessary.

Send your release by email where possible, with a clear subject line, and information about the release in the email body. Don't just send an attachment – if there's no introduction it's unlikely to be opened.

Identify the main media you want to run the story. Give it to them earlier than other channels, and be prepared to give them the scoop (exclusive access to the story).

Follow up the press release with a phone call to the journalist. It is worth remembering that journalists are generally working to a very tight timeframe and on several stories at once, so advance notice, clear information, and a considerate approach can go a long way towards getting your story published.

## If successful

Make sure potential customers see the article. Link to the article from your website (or reproduce with the publication's permission), buy extra copies to give to wholesalers, keep a portfolio of positive media coverage on your front counter. The value of a successful press release should extend well beyond the date the story is published.

## Further assistance

Venture Taranaki can offer feedback on your press release or advice on appropriate distribution channels. Contact Venture Taranaki on 06 759 5150.