

Gaining Positive Media Coverage

Eco Open Homes



Writing Press Releases

What to Include and In What Format

Press releases include standard information in a standard format which you must use if you want an editor to take notice of what you are sending them.

Content

Before you start writing think about the following:

- What is **the story**? Why should the media cover this? What is your **local or human angle** or **hook**?
- **Your message**. What are the key points that you want to get across? **DON'T HAVE MORE THAN THREE**.
- Who are your **audience**? What language should you use to make it appeal to them?
- How can you make it as **concise and clear** as possible? Try to write it with a busy editor in mind – how can you make them keep reading your release when they have lots of others to read too?

Format

- Your release should fit on to one side of A4 (the editors notes can go on a second side in necessary. Photos can be attached separately).
- The font type should be easy to read and the front size should be no smaller than 12.
- It should be typed not handwritten.
- Use headed paper or cut and paste your organisation's logo into a word document. If your organisation doesn't have a logo place your organisation's name in larger font at the top of the page.
- Email it in the body of the email as well as, as an attachment.

Writing a Press Release in 11 Steps

1. **Write 'PRESS RELEASE' at the top.**
2. **Date it and give it a snappy title.** Make sure the title makes it clear what the story is about. Don't make it too obscure and avoid puns.
3. **Give contact details:** the name of the person dealing with the media and a mobile number that will be switched on.
4. If you want photographers or camera crews to attend an event, **mark it 'Photo Opportunity - Crews welcome'** followed by a place, date and time that the press can attend to take photos.
5. **Make it clear when the story is for**, usually: '*For immediate release*'. If you need to keep the story secret until a certain date you can write '*Embargoed until*' followed by a date, but this is no guarantee that the media won't use it until then. It is better to send the release at the point when you are happy for it to be used.
6. **Use the first paragraph to outline the whole story in brief.** This should explain the headline and the ***who, what, when, where, how and why***. Expand in the second (and maybe a third) paragraph, with extra layers of information in decreasing order of importance. The body of the press release should be structured just like a news story, so that an editor can cut from the bottom always leaving the main story intact.
7. **Add a quote from a spokesperson.** The print press will often use this in their story, so make it count. Keep it short and punchy.
8. If you have a **photo, put it in a separate box or attach it as a separate file** and briefly explain what it is of.
9. **Mark the Release 'ENDS'** in capital letters so they know it's over.
10. **Repeat the contact details;**
11. Finally, add '**Notes for the editor**'. This is where you can add background information about your organisation, pieces of research related to your release or any other information. Number your notes and keep them to two-three lines of text each. Notes can be on a separate sheet if necessary, but don't make it longer than half a side.

See overleaf for examples



PRESS RELEASE

28th November 2008

Contact Josephine Smith: 07234 567890

Fairtrade Market in Loughborough

For Immediate Release

Photo Opportunity: Loughborough Town Hall, Saturday 6th December 2009, 10:30am

A Fairtrade Market will take place in Loughborough Town Hall on 6th December 2009 from 10:00am-2pm. The event, organised by Charnwood Action for Fairtrade, will offer shoppers the chance to purchase unique Christmas gifts whilst ensuring that the producers of the gifts have been paid a fair price for their goods.

Stalls will be offering a variety of goods including festive food and drink, gifts for adults and children, sports wear and jewellery. All goods have been made in developing countries by producers who have been guaranteed a fair price for their produce and decent working conditions.

Joe Bloggs, Chair of Charnwood Action for Fairtrade, said:

'We're really delighted to be able to run this event for a third consecutive year. It's always been immensely popular with shoppers in Loughborough and it's a great way to support fairtrade whilst getting your Christmas shopping done.'

ENDS

Contact Josephine Smith: 07234 567890

Notes for editors:

1. Charnwood became the first official Fairtrade Borough in the East Midlands in June 2006. This status was retained in 2008. Becoming a Borough involved meeting a number of criteria including the passing of a resolution by Charnwood Borough Council and convincing as many cafés and shops in the areas as possible to stock food products with the Fairtrade mark.
2. The campaign to become a Fairtrade Borough was spearheaded by Charnwood Action for Fairtrade (CAFF), a local community group. CAFF has also organised a number of events including Fairtrade Coffee Crawls and Fairtrade Markets. Anyone wishing to get involved in CAFF can do so by contact Joe Bloggs on 01509 12345.



Transition Loughborough

Working for a low carbon, sustainable Charnwood.

PRESS RELEASE

19th January 2015

Potato Day Comes to Loughborough

Contact Caroline Harmon: 07954 377569

Photo Opportunity: Loughborough Market place (nr Lloyds TSB), 31st Jan, 9am-3pm
For Immediate Release

Loughborough Residents are being encouraged to 'grow their own' in 2015 by local community group *Transition Loughborough* who are organising the town's first ever *Potato Day*. On Saturday 31st January the group will be selling seed potato on a market stall in the town as well as offering people advice on how to grow their own potatoes.

Transition Loughborough group member, Caroline Harmon, said:

'Growing your own potatoes is an easy, fun way to start growing your own food and now is the time of year to start thinking about it. We will be offering seed potatoes at a bargain price of 14p per tuber. We will also be giving away small buckets to anyone who doesn't have a garden or doesn't want to dig so that they can produce a small crop on a patio, balcony or in a backyard.'

Potato Day's market stall will be close to Lloyd's TSB and will be open from 9am-3pm. Volunteers will be wearing *Transition Loughborough* Aprons.

The group are hoping the event will also raise money for the group's other activities which include a community allotment, events to help people reduce their energy bills and work on local sustainable transport.

ENDS

Contact Caroline Harmon: 07954 377569

Notes for editors:

1. *Transition Loughborough* is a local community group working to tackle the twin challenges of climate change and peak oil in the town. We believe that we need to start taking action now, rather than waiting for politicians and "others" to do the work for us. We aim to be inclusive and cover the broad spectrum of different communities that exist within the town and have members from most wards in the town. We have over 50 members. We are currently planning and/or running local food projects, energy efficiency projects and transport projects. Earlier this year we ran the first ever *Loughborough Energy Efficient Homes* events which saw seven homes in the area open their doors to the public to show off their energy efficient features and renewables.
2. *Transition Chesterfield* have run a *Potato Day* for five years and raise c. £1000 per year from the event as well as encouraging hundreds of local residents to grow their own: www.transitionchesterfield.org



PRESS RELEASE



9th September 2010

Contact: Caroline Harmon, 07748 508704, caroline.harmon@mea.org.uk

Fantastic Home Saves Householders Over £1 Million

Photos Attached

For Immediate Release

Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Residents will save over £1 million on their energy bills in the coming years thanks to a mobile exhibition. Local charity Marches Energy Agency, in conjunction with the Local Authorities Energy Partnership, have taken the **Fantastic Home**, and its predecessor Light Fantastic, to events across the two counties over the last 14 months. The exhibition gives out free energy saving items, such as low energy lightbulbs, showertimers and TV powerdowns, which are donated by utility companies. The savings on electricity bills generated by items given out so far will, over their lifetime, amount to more than £1 million and will benefit almost 10,000 people.

Experienced and friendly advisors also give out energy efficiency advice and information on domestic renewables. Fun, interactive elements include an energy bike which members of the public can pedal to see how much effort it takes to power both a low energy lightbulb and a traditional bulb. Children can play a giant game of 'Low Carbon Snakes and Ladders.'

The £1 million mark was reached during an event at Erewash Waterside Festival over the August Bank Holiday. Since then Fantastic Homes has visited Sutton Bonington Show in Rushcliffe and is due, over the coming months, to visit locations ranging from Shipley Parish Room in Amber Valley and Kelham Hall near Newark to Matlock Victorian Christmas Fair and Energy Saving Week events in the High Peak area. Householders can find out when the event is visiting their area at www.everybodys-talking.org.

Kris McGowan, Team Leader at Marches Energy Agency said:

'We really pleased that the Fantastics have been able to help so many people save money on their energy bills. The items given away will continue to save people money in the years to come. They also help combat climate change by reducing carbon dioxide – so far by more than 2000 tonnes.'

ENDS

Contact: Caroline Harmon, 07748 508704, caroline.harmon@mea.org.uk

Notes for Editors

1. **Fantastic Home** is provided by **Marches Energy Agency** (MEA). MEA is an independent charity and nationally recognised organisation with a remit to disseminate information regarding climate change, energy efficiency and renewable energy. It is involved in projects as diverse as steering local, regional and national policy, assisting community groups, managing energy efficiency projects and assisting with the installation of renewable technologies. More information can be found at www.mea.org.uk. Savings – financial, carbon dioxide emissions and water – are recorded at www.everybodys-talking.org, the Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire climate change portal.
2. **The Local Authorities' Energy Partnership** (LAEP) is made up of all 20 local authorities in Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire including the Peak District National Park Authority. It supports and co-ordinates activities to tackle climate change and fuel poverty and to develop sustainable energy solutions across the sub-region. This includes high profile public campaigns which encourage individuals and communities to reduce their carbon emissions.
3. **Everybody's Talking** is the climate change portal communities in Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire. It is run by MEA on behalf of the LAEP: www.everybodys-talking.org.

Sending a Press Release and Following It Up

Where to send it

- Newspapers use press releases as the basis for lots of their articles.
- Local Radio Stations
- Regional TV News Programmes
- Websites

Who to send it to

You will need to create a list of suitable media to send your press releases too. For each one you will need a named contact and email address. This list will be different for each organisation or individual.

- Newspapers will often have named editorial contacts for different sections of the paper as well as a named Editor and Deputy Editor. You can find these on their website contact pages or by calling their main reception and asking.
- Try to send your release to the person who looks after the section you are aiming at: this will improve your chances of success. If you are unsure, or the contacts aren't broken into sections, send it to the News Desk email address.
- Don't send it to the advertising section: they will try to sell you an advert!
- Don't send it to the letters section. Letters though, are another good way to get publicity for community groups if a spokesperson for the organisations wants to write letters about issues related to the organisation's activities.
- Each time you send a release re-check the website or call to find out if the contact person is the same.

How to send it

Send your release by email:

- Attach the headed document you have produced.
- Cut and paste the entire release into the body of the email.
- For the subject write: PRESS RELEASE followed by the headline of your press release. E.g.: PRESS RELEASE: Fairtrade Market in Loughborough'
- If you are sending your release to several publications in one email put all of the addresses in the 'Bcc' box NOT the 'To' or 'Cc' boxes.

Following Up a Press Release

- If you haven't heard anything after a couple of days it is worth phoning to check they got the release. If they say they didn't, don't complain that you definitely sent it: editors often receive so many that they don't read them all. Instead, politely offer to send it again and ask if there is a best email address to send it. Send it as soon as you get off the phone so that they receive it straightaway before they forget. If they did receive it if ask if they have questions about the release and if they intend to use it.

- If you are offered a photo opportunity and the paper doesn't send a photographer take some photos yourself and send one with another release shortly after the event. Newspapers will often cover events after they happen which is still good press coverage for your organisation.
- If the press do pick the story up, you could be asked to give an interview: this will be covered in another section.

Media Interviews

Top Tips for Giving an Interview to the Media

Before the Interview

- Decide on no more than three most important bits of information you want to get across and try to find some facts to get across. Rehearse getting these three points across in a clear and succinct way. If they ask you other questions that aren't relevant or are an attempt to divert you say: *'I'm not here to talk about that - I'm here to tell your readers/listeners...'*

Example

You work for Nottingham Obesity Fighters (fictional!) and have sent out a press release regarding a market stall your organisation is having in the city centre. The three points you want to get across in you interview, in descending order of importance, are:

- 1) Nottingham Obesity Fighters will have a stall in Nottingham's main square on 1st December 2010 with information to help people tackle obesity. Staff at the stall will be available to advise people on how they can do more exercise to tackle obesity. Any is welcome to come along between 8am and 2pm for an informal chat.
- 2) Obesity in the UK is rising. [According to the Department for Health almost one quarter of adults are obese.](#)
- 3) Doing physical activity is a good way to prevent and tackle obesity. [According to the Chief Medical Officer undertaking 30 minutes of activity each day will help prevent more than 20 conditions including coronary heart disease, mental health problems, type two diabetes and certain types of cancer.](#)

The black bits are what you want to get across. The bits in blue are facts to back up what you want to get across.

- If you're worried or nervous ask to see the questions in advance.
- Remember that the interviewer needs news as much as you need the coverage: don't feel you have to give the interview if you think they might want to give you negative coverage or are going to twist what you will say.
- Know what you can and can't talk about: if necessary discuss it with colleagues and superiors in advance to check if there are things they would rather you didn't talk about to the press.

During the Interview

- It's not just what you say but how you say it. You need to sound passionate, intelligent and knowledgeable, but without ranting or rambling. Use short, firm sentences.

- In a recorded interview for radio you can ask to give your answer again to make it clearer.
- If you don't know the answer to something say so. Offer to find out the answer and email them as soon as possible after the interview.
- Don't say 'No Comment'. Instead say: 'Sorry it's our organisation's policy never to discuss...'
- You are never off the record even when the interview has 'ended' and you are just chatting: if you don't want something in print don't say it!
- Remember that you are representing your organisation's opinion not your own.

After the Interview

- Get a copy of the article or a recording of the radio or TV and sit down and honestly assess it.
 - Would Joe Public who knows nothing about the subject have understood?
 - What two things would you do differently next time you give an interview to make it better?

Three Kinds of Media Interview

1) Positive

This is the kind you will give most often.

An example is you have advertised an event you are putting on and a journalist wants to interview you to ask questions about it, such as when is it happening, how can people get involved and what do you hope to achieve as a result of the event?

These kinds of interviews usually result in positive coverage.

2) Defensive

A newspaper thinks they have got hold of a negative story about your organisation and want to ask you about it.

- If you have a negative situation which the press may get hold of prepare in advance what you might say if they do. That said, don't offer it to them if they haven't got hold of it!
- If the media contact you before you have a chance to do this feel free to say that you will look into the issue right way and get back to them.
- Prepare a written press statement, read this to the journalist over the phone or email and stick to it!
- Try to make a positive point about the situation.

Example one: If they have got wind of the fact that you are making redundancies point out that you are hoping most redundancies will be a mixture of natural wastage and voluntary redundancy.

Example Two: If they have rung to ask you about reported rising truancy rates at your school point out that your truancy rates are still well below the average or that you are appointing a member of staff specifically to tackle truancy or whatever else you are doing to tackle it. Don't lie, but do point out anything positive you can that is true.

3) Explorative

This means the journalist is writing a feature article and wants some information from you: maybe quotes from your senior staff or statistics you have gathered about your field of work. This is likely to happen if the journalist is already aware of your organisation from previous press releases and knows that you are reliable and respond quickly to enquiries.

- Find out exactly what they want before you agree to provide anything. Be sure you can provide what they need and find the most suitable person in your organisation to provide it.

Gaining Positive Media Coverage. Nottinghamshire & Derbyshire Eco Open Homes

- Don't try to sell your organisation: they are writing an article not an advertorial. Give them facts.
- Go on to explain how your organisation fits into the facts or the overall picture. Maybe you are the only provider in your town/region of a particular service or your organisation was the first to achieve a certain accreditation.
- Any quotes on the article should be credited such as your name, your job title, your organisation. E.g. '...said John Smith, Conservation Officer at Greeny Greens'.
- Make sure the journalist has your organisation's name, the name of people they have interviewed and their contact details. This is where you will get positive coverage: your organisation offering an authoritative opinion within the article.

Other Ways of Working with Your Local Media

Events Listings

Most local papers have a 'what's on' section which may have its own email. Press releases for events can be sent to this email as well as to the editor of the relevant section.

Letter Writing

Letters to the editor or the letter page can get your organisation coverage. You can't use them to get coverage of your event but you can use them to comment on issues related to your organisation's work. Remember:

- **Editors like controversial discussion going on in their letters column.** If your organisation feels strongly about an issue take the opportunity to write in and say so. This works especially well if the issue is topical.
- **Keep it calm and intelligent.**
- **Keep the readership of the newspaper in mind** – are they going to be interested?
- **Concise, amusing letters that are under 80 words long stand a very good chance of publication.** Don't try and cover too much ground in a short letter. It is better just to make one or two points clearly and emphatically, the editor might choose to cut out your most important point otherwise.
- **Find out what the usual style and length of letters is** for the publication you are writing to.
- **Always include your name and organisation and an address** if you want your organisation to get coverage!

Offer a Column or Advice Section

Once you have built up a relationship with an editor you could look for a gap in their paper or radio shows for information you could provide. For instance, if you are a sandwich making company you could provide a recipe each week. If you are an environmental charity you could provide advice answering people's questions about environmental issues. You will need to sell the idea to the editor:

- Explain why the paper's readership or radio's listeners will be interested in what you are offering.
- Explain how this fills a gap in the paper's present content.
- Provide three samples columns/ pieces of advice to show that you can write and the range of what the column or advice section would include.