

## The Press Release

In the first article in this series on Public Relations we discussed the various ways community involvement could benefit not only the community but your law firm and its reputation.

Media-related Public Relations efforts involve formulating a message about the service you provide and delivering it on a large scale, via print, radio or television. When you advertise, or get media attention, your message is conveyed to a significantly larger audience than simple marketing efforts can impact. The reach of both be very broad and include millions of people.

For most small and mid-sized law firms, most PR opportunities will occur with print and on-line media such as newspapers, magazines, trade journals and on-line publications. In the small firm setting public relations efforts are usually confined to the production of announcements and news releases which are placed in the local paper as well as articles written for legal journals and trade publications.

The Press Release, which is a written summary of an upcoming event or client related news is one of the tools you'll need to communicate your message to the press. Once written, it is distributed to print publications, radio and television news programs as appropriate.

In order to enhance your chances of being published, cultivate a relationship with the right editor in your target publication and submit a press release equal in length to the articles they usually publish. Since these editors are very busy

people—don't make them read a page and a half to find your 'news'—they'll pick up someone else's release, or bypass yours in the future if you make them too wordy. And don't expect to have a release published every time it's submitted.

To make distribution easy, compile a group of contacts to whom you can e-mail your releases with the push of a button. Keep your list current, as editors and staff writers change, and you want your releases to reach the proper person. ['Blind' e-mails are also appreciated when sending mass mailings].

According to Nancy Butler-Ross, former columnist for the Miami Herald, if your news release is not hard news and doesn't contain "breaking" news, submit it as a feature distribution. If your news is business related, submit it to the business section. If it's event-related, submit it to a Calendar section, as well as to the appropriate editor. If your release is about an event you're hosting, make sure to extend an invitation to the editor --they may assign someone to cover it and write a story.

General print publications such as your local newspaper, for example, will be read by a wide variety of people whose demographics might be a good fit for your potential clients and possible referral sources. In your local newspaper there are most likely opportunities to be quoted in front page news stories or features in the business, financial, real estate or lifestyle section.

A real estate attorney might contribute to or write an article on how to avoid predatory lending practices for the real estate section. An elder law attorney might be quoted in a story on the sandwich generation: middle-aged parents who are trying to raise children and care for aging parents at the same time. A criminal defense attorney might comment on the link between illiteracy and

criminal tendencies among young offenders. On Law Day some firms regularly place articles educating the public about the inner-workings of the law.

If, however, you are an estate planning attorney and wish to cultivate more CPAs, you might have more success if you target their local trade publications. It's up to you -- or your marketing assistant if you have one -- to know where you should be featured to provide the greatest impact. Often, the publications most sought by or trusted by your referral sources has the greatest impact.

When you are involved in a newsworthy event write a press release following the format below. It can be distributed to newspapers, magazines, television stations and radio contacts. Make up a group of contacts to whom you can e-mail these releases with the push of a button.

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Capitalize all letters in this headline and place this title in the upper left-hand margin.

#### **The Headline**

A single sentence that gives summarizes the essence of your text. Put in lowercase any articles, prepositions or conjunctions of three letter words or less.

#### **The Dateline**

List here the date of your press release and the city it is issued from.

#### **Lead Paragraph**

Write a strong introductory paragraph to grab the reader's attention. Use the journalistic device of formatting your message to follow the Five Ws: who, what, when, where and why. While this paragraph should be a

summary of what's to come in the rest of the text, if effectively written it hooks your reader and encourages them to read on.

### **Body**

The main text of your press release is where you expand upon your news. Many journalists use the inverted pyramid technique in which the most critical information and any pertinent quotes are placed at the beginning.

### **Firm Information**

End your press release with a brief paragraph that describes your firm, its practice areas and history.

### **Contact Information**

List the name, e-mail address and phone number of the person who wrote the press release and is qualified to discuss the subject matter.

If you follow this press release format and develop good working relationships with the media contacts in your area you'll raise your profile in the community, increase your exposure to potential clients and referral sources and greatly increase the chances of seeing *your* firm in the spotlight.