

News Releases

Communication historians report that the first news release was a graduation announcement issued in 1758 by King's College (now Columbia University). In the last 2½ centuries, the news release has become a mainstay of public relations writing. Today, proportionally fewer people read newspapers than in previous generations; one-third of American households do not even subscribe to a newspaper. Television news attracts at most two-thirds of Americans aged 18 to 35. Yet despite this fragmentation of media, public relations writers still count the news release as one of their most important tools.

Organizations in all kinds of situations use news releases to make announcements, encourage support, respond to critics, invite participation and report progress. In addition, the same kind of writing associated with news releases is the basis for effective writing for organizational newsletters and internal newspapers.

For some practitioners, media relations will be the primary focus. For others, it may be less important, but the ability to write with a news approach remains a basic skill needed to succeed in the profession. In virtually every career opportunity in public relations, you will be expected to have mastered this type of writing. In many job interviews, you will be tested on your ability to write a news release.

News-Style Writing

A *news release* is a communication format commonly used by organizations to provide information to the news media. Before we talk specifically about news releases, it is important to review some of the conventions of news-style writing that the effective public relations writer must observe. Drawn from print journalism, these are based on the need to be both objective and accessible to audiences. Most of what follows will be reminders, because you probably have learned these in previous classes or other writing activities; however, it is important material to review. Remember that the same news values and quality writing that make a good news story are needed to make a good news release.

Short Sentences

All public relations writing should strive for simplicity of style, but news writing especially cries out for this quality. Use short, simple words. Readability studies suggest using words averaging 1½ syllables. Sentences should be brief, with an average of 16 words when the writing is for general audiences. For visual appeal and readability, paragraphs also should be short, generally six lines maximum. When text is transferred into newspaper columns, a single typewritten line on 8½-by-11-inch paper will yield about 2½ or three lines of newspaper text. Thus, six typed lines of news release type would yield about 15 lines in a newspaper—more than 2 inches of unbroken type. To ensure easier reading, newspapers need more frequent paragraphs breaks.

Simple Language

News releases have a few language idiosyncrasies that should be respected. Memorize and use them routinely. Here are some of the most common writing conventions for news releases.

Use the basic word *said* rather than striving for more subjective alternatives such as *exclaimed, proclaimed, declared, related, asserted* and *remarked*.

Make careful use of objective varieties such as *noted, added, pointed out, replied* and *declined to comment*.

Use the past tense *said* to report information that already has been provided or uttered.

Avoid subjective superlatives such as *best*, *most useful* and *greatest*.

Use great care with objective superlatives such as *biggest*, *first*, *unique* and *only*.

Avoid hard-sell advertising-based terms such as *breakthrough* and *revolutionary*.

Use simple verb tenses such as *will begin* rather than the progressive forms such as *will be beginning*, which indicate an ongoing action.

Prefer future forms of verbs such as *will attend* rather than *is planning to attend*.

Prefer past perfect forms of verbs for past action of indeterminate timing: *The company has appointed a new director*.

Use past tense only with specific times, and only when the time is relevant: *The company appointed a new director last week*.

Attribution of Quotes

Often, public relations writers wish to present information and opinions that come from someone they have interviewed. Other times, the statements may emerge from printed materials. Or perhaps the public relations writer wants to suggest an appropriate comment by an organizational spokesperson.

In whatever context, statements made by people need to be attributed to them. The most common attribution involves the past-tense form of the verb *to say*, such as *she said* or *they said*. This attribution, also called a *speech tag*, is used not only with direct quotes but also with paraphrases.

Writing Objectively

In news writing, readers should know they are obtaining facts, not the opinion, speculation or editorial comments of the writer. As a public relations writer preparing news copy, you will need to observe this practice by writing objectively, avoiding commercial plugs, and eliminating flowery language and fawning reports.

Does this mean that a news piece includes no opinion? Absolutely not! A news re-lease or any similar news-based writing can have plenty of opinion and comment. But the opinion is presented with attribution. For example, it may be the writer's opinion that the annual fundraising effort is for a very worthy cause, but the writer cannot include that as a matter of fact. However, the writer may report the fact that the mayor called the cause very worthy. The writer also may include information about the positive community benefits provided through past fundraising efforts, allowing the reader to conclude that the program is worthwhile. As a public relations writer, you should report facts, attribute opinion, and know the difference between the two. Report facts because they provide information that is a matter of record. Attribute opinions and document comments so they become factual records of what someone said, rather than the inappropriate opinions of the writer.

Accuracy

Accuracy is crucial. Check and double check all facts. Check spelling, punctuation and correct use of the stylebook. Pay particular attention to names and titles, and make sure there is a full first reference. Sometimes a result of rearranging, adding and deleting information as part of the revision process is that information is lost. Be careful that a stray surname or an unidentified person doesn't pop up within the story. One way of checking for accuracy is to read your writing out loud. This will help you slow down and will prevent you from overlooking mistakes.

Newsworthy Information

News writing doesn't tell us what we already know or what we can easily conclude on our own. For example, don't write that *The CEO is proud of the company's success*. That's not news. Instead, cite reasons why the CEO is proud—because third-quarter profits were the highest ever or because this was the most accident-free year on record. Neither is it news that *The employee said she is happy about her promotion* or *When the director asked the committee to meet, the committee chair said a meeting would be scheduled*. Faced with non-news statements such as these, you have two choices: eliminate the statement, which is probably what you'd do about the happy employee, or expand on the statement, such as by noting more about the rescheduled meeting time and place.

News Release Format

Amateurs and professionals alike follow the same format for news releases. This format is so versatile that it lends itself to many writing purposes. Here are some guidelines about format to help you prepare a standard news release.

Physical Format Use standard 8 1/2-by-11-inch paper, preferably white or off-white. Use standard black ink. Avoid paper with decorative borders. Prepare the release on a computer or word processor, using line spacing of 1.5 or 2.

By definition, a news release is a beginning piece of information for an editor or news director. It should not look like a final copy but rather like a working draft that welcomes the editor to mark it for publication or air use. So justify the left margin and leave the right margin ragged. Don't hyphenate your text.

Use a clean, professional-looking type; 12-point Times Roman is the best choice.

Components

First impressions are important, and editors often make judgments about the credibility of a public relations writer when they first glance at the news releases.

Several standard components should be part of every news release, regardless of the type of organization preparing it. By including these components in your release, you signal to the editor that you know your craft. In addition to certain conventions of common usage presented below, you will find several optional items that writers sometimes include in their releases.

Letterhead. Type your release on official organizational letterhead, either the regular letterhead used for most of the organization's business correspondence or on special letterhead developed for news releases.

News Flag. A *news flag* simply is the word *news* printed in large type. This is an optional part of the release heading. Some writers use a news flag to make it absolutely clear to an editor that this is a news release rather than some other type of communication. Other writers feel that the news release format is obvious.

Organization Contact. The heading should feature the name and address of the sending organization. A general telephone number or perhaps a Web site might be included. Try to limit extraneous information and corporate tags such as affiliation with a parent company or a nonprofit funding source.

Personal Contact. The heading also should identify the public relations contact person (usually the same person who prepared the news release). This information should include the name, as well as day and evening/weekend telephone numbers; a fax number and e-mail address also may be appropriate. There is no particular order for this, and personal or organizational preference allows for flexible design, though a good design takes up only a small amount of space.

Distribution Date. News releases need two dates. The first is the day the release is mailed, faxed or otherwise distributed. This is presented in the conventional manner for the editor or news director receiving the release:

month, day and year (June 26, 2003) for North American media; day, month and year (26 June, 2003) for releases prepared for media in other parts of the world or for military media, where such a format is more common. As “FYI: Lead Time” explains, understanding lead time is an important part of determining when your news release should be sent.

Date of Intended Use. The second date indicates when the release may actually be used by the news media. Generally, this is handled with the phrase *For Immediate Release*, signifying that the release may be used as soon as the news media wishes to use it. This phrase is standard in most parts of North America, so much so that journalists take it for granted that they may use a release as soon as they receive it. Indeed, the phrase is becoming optional. Some public relations practitioners have stopped using the phrase, prompted by journalists’ observation that, in an era of instantaneous dissemination of news releases, *For Immediate Release* is becoming a meaningless cliché. An alternative to immediate release is to indicate an *embargo*, in which you ask that the release not be used before a specific time and day, such as *For release after 6 a.m., February 1, 2003*.

Avoid asking for an embargo, because there are few reasons for it. First, an embargo imposes no obligation on the news media, and often causes conflict among various media if the embargo is not observed by each of them. Second, it seems to tease reporters with advance information they are asked not to use. With the current technology of rapid, even instantaneous transmission of news releases, the embargo is becoming a relic of the past.

Headline. The *headline* (or *summary*) traditionally has been seen as an optional element for the news release. It signals the content of the release to the editor or news director, and thus may attract attention to its contents. But the headline is seldom published as written, and some writers would rather have the editor evaluate the newsworthiness of the release on the basis of the lead paragraph rather than the shorter headline. If a headline is used, it should have a prominent look, such as with the use of all-capital letters, underlining, bold face, and/or centering immediately above the text of the re-lease. Headlines are written in the standard newspaper style, generally in the present tense.

However, electronic dissemination of news releases is causing the headline to make a comeback. Headlines are particularly useful with electronic archives. An agency, for example, may prepare several news releases in the same month for one of its clients. Let’s call the client CompuTrim. Without headlines, all of the company’s news releases for June would be archived under the same name, CompuTrim-USA. But with headlines, the news releases would be distinguishable in an archive such as NEXIS. For example, *CompuTrim Names New CEO, CompuTrim Announces Record Third-Quarter Profits, CompuTrim Opening Branch in Seattle*.

Dateline. A *dateline*, an occasional element of a news release, features the name of the city or town where the release originates. Despite its name, the dateline does not include a date. The name stems from the early days of American journalism, when it could take several days, or even longer, to publish a story from a distant correspondent. With today’s technology, all stories can be published the day they are written, so the date has disappeared from the dateline.

The dateline is not optional, but it is not always needed. Use a dateline when the re-lease is being sent beyond the local area of the sending organization. When a dateline is used, the city name is typed in all-capital letters, followed by The Associated Press Stylebook state abbreviation in regular (not all-cap) text. Use a dash to separate the dateline from the beginning text of the release.

Some cities are well-known nationally or regionally and may stand alone without the state, province or country designation. (Consult the stylebook for a listing of these cities.) For datelines in regional releases, omit the state if it is not needed for clarity.

End Mark. Place a final *end mark* at the conclusion of the release, centered following the last line. The most common version of this is a series of hatch marks, (#####). Alternatives are the word ((END)), often set off with double parentheses, and the rather outdated printing notation, -30-.

More Line. News releases also contain a notation that signals to the editor or news director that the release is running more than one page. This *more line* is typed at the bottom of the first page if the release is more than one page long. Common versions are ((more)) or ((more-more-more))—in double parentheses. This notation can be used only after a complete paragraph. Never use it after a line of type that does not end the paragraph.

Slug Line. When text continues on a second page, use a *slug line* (usually in capital letters) at the top of the second page, capsulizing the headline or offering a one- or two-word summary, and indicating the page number. For example: BANK PROMOTIONS—

Because the more line is used only after a full paragraph, the slugline always will be followed by a new paragraph of text.

Editor's Note. An optional feature that may follow the end mark is the editor's note, which is a message directed to editors and news directors and not meant for publication. An editor's note may verify an unusual spelling or give a street address for identification. Sometimes the note will offer special access to photographers, or it may offer interviews or additional information. The note also is a place to draw attention to a trademark or service mark or to provide background identification about the sending organization

Exhibit 6.1—COMPONENTS OF A NEWS RELEASE A properly formatted news release.

NEWS from **Organization's Name**

Street Address
City, State, ZIP
Web Site (optional)

Public Relations Contact Person
Office Telephone Number
Out-of-Office Contact (Telephone/Pager)
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Sending Date

OPTIONAL HEADLINE, ALL-CAPS AND CENTERED

DATETIME CITY, State—Begin with the heading information, including the organization's name and address, and perhaps a main telephone number or Web site. Include the name and contact information for the public relations director or writer.

A news flag is an optional part of the heading. Note both the sending date and the release date, usually indicated by the phrase "For Immediate Release." Keep this heading as small as possible so as not to take up valuable space for the news release.

You may include a headline. If you do, use present tense and type it in all-capital letters and centered over the body of the news release.

Begin the body of the release immediately after the optional dateline, or after the date if you do not use a headline. Allow left and right margins of at least one inch. Type copy in line-spacing intervals of 1.5 or 2 to allow the editor to mark up the copy. Also, use an unjustified (ragged) right margin. Do not hyphenate words at the end of lines.

Keep paragraphs short, usually between two and five typed lines. Remember that one line of typed copy will equal about three lines of type in newspaper columns. Use standard paragraph indents of about one-half inch, with no extra spacing between paragraphs.

"The news release should look like a manuscript," said Ron Smith, the author of this textbook. "You want the editor to take out a pencil and begin marking up your news release for use in the paper. That's your immediate objective."

Make every effort to keep the release to a single page, and conclude the release with an end mark centered below the last line, said Smith.

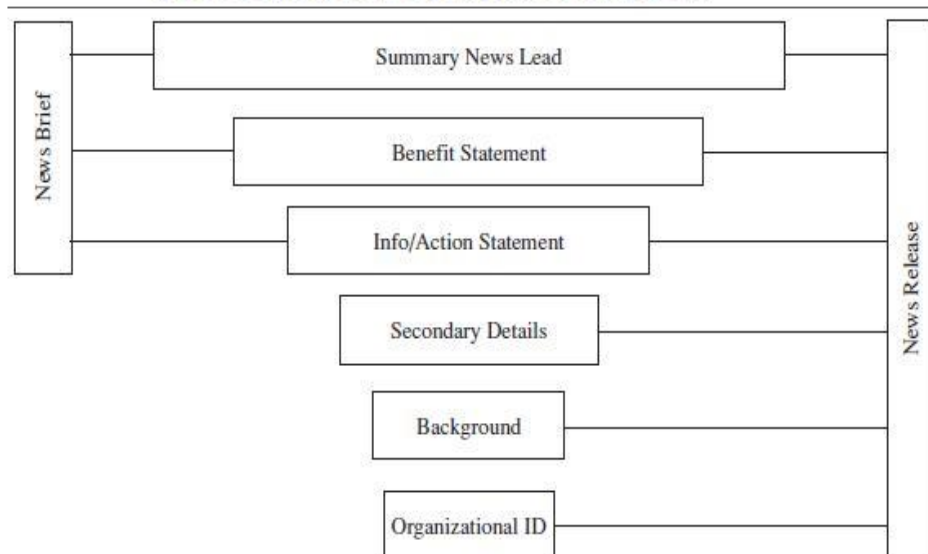
If it is necessary to continue the news release to a second page, make the break on a paragraph. Never break in the middle of a paragraph. Include a more line at the bottom of the first page, and include a slugline at the top of the second page.

Basics of News Release Writing

Writing for public relations is not like a paint-by-numbers kit; you cannot simply fill in blanks on a news release template and prepare an effective release. Writing a good re-lease takes talent and planning. However, guidelines do exist to channel your talent and planning toward conventional news-style writing. What follows is not a formula but rather a pattern found in most effective news releases. Learn this model and adapt it to suit the needs of your particular writing project.

Most news releases follow a format similar to the basic news article—the well-known *inverted pyramid style*, in which the most important information is at the top, with information of lesser importance following. This provides for the most important information to be presented first. Exhibit 6.2 depicts the elements of a news release following the inverted pyramid style. But remember that no formula should dictate how a news release is written. Let the formula be your guide, but temper it with your own news judgment, writing skill and common sense.

Exhibit 6.2—ELEMENTS OF A NEWS RELEASE The relationship between the various elements of a news brief and a news release.



Lead

Beginnings are a big deal in all kinds of writing, and public relations writers take leads seriously. The *lead* is the first paragraph of a news release. Its purpose is to attract the attention of each member of your key public—first the media gatekeeper who will decide whether to use the release and then the reader, listener or viewer. The most common type of lead used by public relations writers is the *summary news lead*, which presents the most significant and interesting facts in the first one or two paragraphs.

Benefit Statements

A *benefit statement* is the biggest difference between how a public relations writer prepares a news release and how a journalist writes a news story with the same information. This statement clearly indicates the benefit you are offering the key public among the audience for this release, answering the question, “So what?”

One of the smoothest ways to highlight the benefit statement is by developing it as a quote or narrative in which you implement your planning sheet ideas for explaining the advantage to your public.

Secondary Details

Secondary details amplify information in the lead. Look back at each of the elements of the summary news lead: who, what, when, where and why. Also review the “so what” information from the benefit statement. Consider how you might expand on each of these elements to provide readers with relevant information.

Background Information

Background information provides a context for the report. This information often is an attempt to help address your objectives, perhaps by using quotes. This may include information on the history of a project or its wider setting.

Organizational Identification

An optional part of the news release is an *organizational identification*. This is a paragraph with standard wording that routinely is dropped into a news release. **For example:** Acme is the oldest pharmaceutical company in the Southwest. It is a division of Worldwide Medical Products, Inc., with offices and research laboratories in North and South America and in Europe.

Many news releases do not include an organizational ID. Such standard information is seldom published, but some writers find IDs useful for providing background on their organization.

News Brief

A news brief is a capsule of the information in the fuller release. Thus, it is clear and concise in serving the interests of the busy reader, who may not read any further.

At the same time, a news brief is a well-crafted presentation of the organization’s message. It summarizes the information, positioning it in terms that focus on the message’s benefit to readers.

Tips for Better Writing <i>News Releases</i>	
Use this checklist to make sure you have included each of the major elements of a well-written news release.	
Planning Sheet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action Statement • Information Content • Writing to Objectives • Relevance to Public • Impact of Quotes • Attribution of Information • Polished Writing • Factual Accuracy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate Public(s) • Analysis of Key Public(s) • Benefit to Public(s) • Writing Objectives 	
Physical Format	Writing Mechanics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heading and ending information • Text (type, margins, spacing, indentation) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spelling • Stylebook • Language Usage • Punctuation • Professional Appearance • Readability Level
Writing	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong Lead • Benefit Statement 	

SAMPLE 1: NEWS RELEASE WITH NEWS BRIEF

InterGalactic Motors, Ltd.

Mid-State Division
123 Harrison Road
Centerville, Xx 12345

Kim Salvatore
Public Relations Director
(123) 987-6543 Ext. 21

September 25, 2003
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Mid-State Division of InterGalactic Motors will sponsor a Safe Driving Clinic Saturday, Oct. 18, at its Harrison Road Plant. The clinic is free for Marlon County Residents.

The clinic will provide both information and hands-on practice in driving safety. Participants also can earn extra points toward reduction of fines for traffic offenses, as well as credits toward discounts for auto insurance.

The Safe Driving Clinic will begin at 9 a.m. at the Employee Cafeteria, located in Building "G" at the plant. Area residents as well as nonresidents attending local colleges may register for the clinic by contacting the InterGalactic Employee Center at 987-6543.

The clinic will be led by InterGalactic Motors training and testing experts and by representatives of the Central Automobile Club of Centerville.

InterGalactic Motors is offering similar clinics at plants throughout the state. The public clinics were scheduled in the wake of testimony before Congress by Willam Newbauer, InterGalactic Motors president. Newbauer addressed the Joint Committee on Transportation and Safety in Washington last month (Aug. 15) on the need for auto manufacturers to take the lead in promoting driving safety.

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Note to Editors:

Willam is correct spelling.

SAMPLE 2

NEWS

**St. Francis Hospital
& Health Center**

12345 Main Street
Springfield, Xx 12345
www.sfhhc.org

Contact: Thomas Tyler
(123) 456-7890 - Office
(123) 654-3210 - Home

June 4, 2003

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Springfield banker Eli Holcomb has been elected to his second term as president of the board of directors of the St. Francis Hospital Foundation. Holcomb, vice president of the First Springfield Bank and Trust Co., has been a member of the foundation board for seven years.

Other newly elected officers include Marian Demerly, director of the Springfield County Library System, as vice president; Rabbi Steven Schneider of Beth Shalom Synagogue, as treasurer; and Sylvia Martain, associate director of the Native American Center, as secretary.

The hospital board also elected Michael Whitefeather, principle of Mission Academy, to serve a two-year term as a board trustee.

As the fund-raising arm of the hospital, the foundation sponsors the Springfield County Medical Appeal. That appeal annually provides more than \$2 million for patient services at both St. Francis Hospital and its downtown family care center, St. Claire Clinic.

Details about the foundation, including audited statements of accountability, are available from the foundation office at (123) 456-7899 or at its Web site: www.sfhhc.org.

St. Francis Hospital and Health Center is a 436-bed facility with full medical services. It features special units for cardiac care, oncology, geriatrics and rehabilitation medicine, as well as emergency care. St. Claire Clinic is an extended-site facility providing a full range of family-health services.

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Fact Sheets

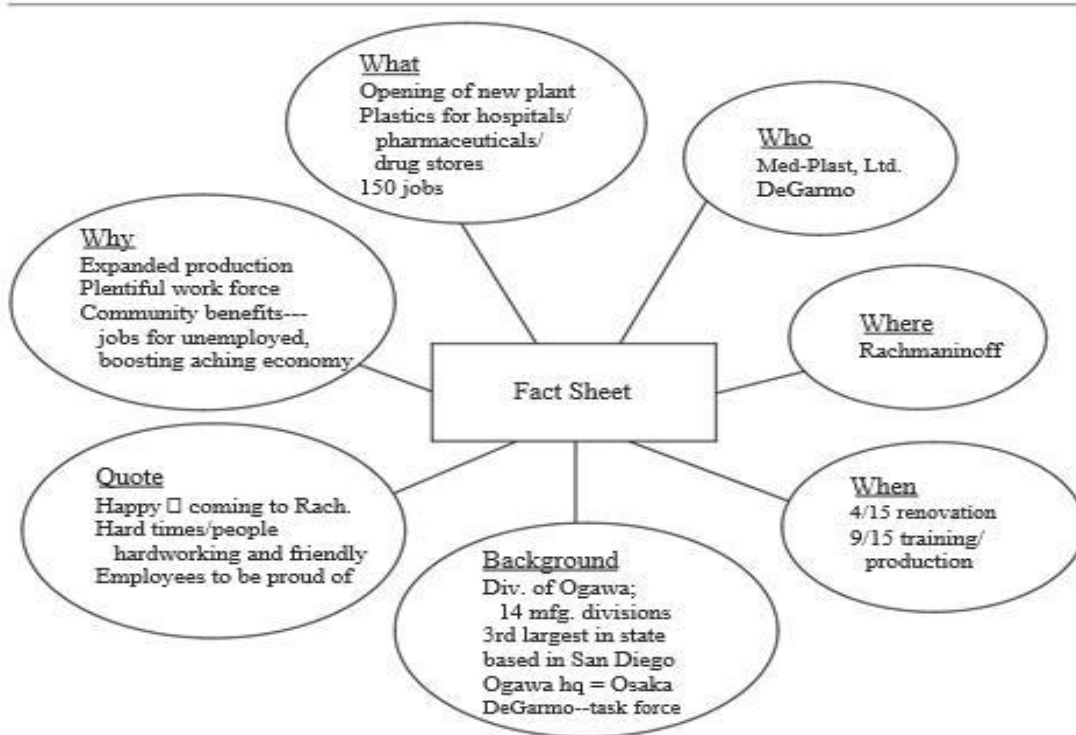
Fact sheets, which are the easiest way to disseminate information to the news media, provide information stripped down to the bare facts. Essentially, they are bits of strategic and newsworthy information that public relations writers give to reporters to provide a basis for stories the reporters will write. They answer the standard journalistic questions—who, what, when, where, why and how. They might also provide background information, benefit statements, quotes and other information that the public relations writer thinks would be useful to the reporters.

Fact sheets can be included in a media kit along with a news release or disseminated to reporters in place of a release. In addition, fact sheets have several uses beyond media relations, such as vehicles for providing information to employees or consumers.

For an organization with its public relations staff at the central headquarters and a number of outlying sites without public relations staffs, fact sheets can be especially useful. A school district, for example, may have a publicity contact at each school site prepare fact sheets for routine information to be distributed directly to the media or circulated “in-house” among the various school buildings and administrative offices. These might provide information on things such as PTA meetings, scheduled athletic events, parent conferences and open houses.

Note that a defining characteristic of fact sheets, as the term is used here, is that they are event based; they deal with a specific activity. Event-based fact sheets are easy to prepare. They require only a

Exhibit 5.2—GRAPHIC ORGANIZER FOR NEWS FACT SHEET This model graphically displays the various elements of the fact sheet depicted in Exhibit 5.3.



minimum writing level and little experience in writing for the news media, though they include essentially the same information that would be included in a more complex news format such as a news release.

Exhibit 5.3—FACT SHEET This fact sheet presents the same information displayed graphically in Exhibit 5.2. Note that, as a fact sheet, it focuses on a new event (the opening of a new plant).

MED-PLAST, LIMITED

A DIVISION OF OGAWA INDUSTRIES

123 MAIN STREET ☐ CENTRAVILLE Xx 12345

Regina VanDerPlanck ☐ Vice President Corporate Communications ☐ (123) 555-12345

Fact Sheet: New Textile Plant

Jan. 23, 2003

Who

Med-Plast, Limited (a division of Ogawa Industries)
John DeGarmo, president and CEO

What

Opening new plant
Manufacturing plastic materials for hospitals, pharmaceutical companies, drug stores
Hiring 150 production workers

Where

Rachmaninoff (Mathewson County), small town with 57 percent unemployment

When

Staggered hiring schedule
Renovation of former Central Rails plant begins April 15
Training and production begins Sept. 15

Why

Textiles Limited wishes to expand production
Seeks new plant in area with a plentiful work force
Prefers community that could benefit from this expansion

Benefits

New jobs for currently unemployed workers
Boost to ailing small-town economy

Quote

DeGarmo: "I'm happy about the prospect of coming to Rachmaninoff. The town has had some tough times, but the people here are hard working and friendly. They are the kind of employees any company would be proud to have."

Background on Textiles Limited

Based in Centraville
It is the state's third-largest producer of medical plastics
DeGarmo is a member of Manufacturer's Task Force on Depressed Communities

Background on Ogawa Industries

Based in San Diego
Nationwide company

Factoids

In addition to event-based fact sheets that serve as substitute news releases, a related communication tool can provide background on issues, programs or products. These *factoids* are brief bits of information about an organization and/or the programs or issues it deals with. Factoids, also called *breaker boxes*, simplify complex information, thus helping reporters and editorial writers, as well as readers, become familiar with topics of concern to an organization.

Note that whereas fact sheets deal with events, factoids deal with issues. For example, a hospital preparing for a high-profile type of experimental heart surgery may prepare a factoid to explain to reporters the various surgical terms, techniques and equipment involved. Factoids also may provide an overview of the history of an organization or a program, or it may identify milestones in its development. Such factoids could be useful not only to reporters but also to many other publics.

Exhibit —FACTOID This factoid explains a program at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minn., to recycle books and distribute them in Africa. Note that the factoid provides background information on the program rather than solid news that would be found in a fact sheet.

Recyclable: **BOOKS**

WE RECYCLE:

- All books, hard back or paper back.

WHERE TO RECYCLE:

- Stack unwanted books next to any corridor recycling containers for pick up.
- If you have a large number of books you would like recycled, please call the recycling coordinator at (962)2-6388 to arrange a mutually agreeable pick up time.
- The dean of students office collects books for the Books for Africa Foundation in St. Paul. At the end of each semester a collection table for the books is staffed in the lower atrium of Murray-Herrick near the bookstore during the book buy back periods. During the school year, books may be taken to the dean's office in Rm 100 MHC. Books may also be left at the Recycling Center on the loading dock of the Physical Plant.

Facts About **BOOKS:**

- Books are a very recyclable commodity. Buying used course books reduces paper consumption and reduces the strain on tight student budgets. Used course books may be sold and purchased from the UST Bookstore (962-6850) or through the book co-op sponsored by the Arnold Air Society in Foley Theatre (962-6320).
- Public libraries are outstanding examples of community recycling. One book can be read by hundreds if not thousands of people. The use of library books reduces the consumption of our environmental resources. Check out the nearby Saint Paul Public Libraries the next time you are looking for a good read!
- St. Paul has a wealth of book stores who buy and sell used books. Some stores in the UST vicinity worth investigating for your reading needs or for the cash value of unwanted books include:
Midway Book Store 1579 University Ave.
Half Price Books 2041 Ford Parkway
Harold's Book Store 186 W 7th St.
Cheapo Books 80 Snelling Ave. N.
- Books for Africa, the designated charity for UST textbooks, gives our donated books to schools and libraries in 18 African countries including Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Eritrea, Ethiopia, the Gambia, Nigeria, Liberia, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Namibia, Zambia, Sudan, Zimbabwe, Swaziland, Malawi, and South Africa. It is estimated that 25 Africans will read each book sent.

Memos and Letters to the Media

Public relations writers find that business communiqués to editors of print media and to news directors or assignment editors of electronic media can generate coverage of their organizations. The five most common types of communication are media advisories, public advisories, story idea memos, pitch letters and query letters.

Media Advisories

Public relations writers occasionally find it useful to communicate directly with editors and news directors. *Media advisories*, also called *media alerts*, are straightforward memos notifying the media about an upcoming newsworthy activity related to the organization. Whereas a news release provides information about an event, a media advisory merely informs the media that something newsworthy will occur. For example, you may offer reporters advance access to a visiting celebrity willing to give an interview. Or you may notify photographers about a photo opportunity, or photo op, that emphasizes the visual aspects of an upcoming activity.

Advisories generally are written in memo form, addressed to a generic title, such as *Editors and News Directors*. Note that the writing is straightforward, allowing the information to speak for itself. Media advisories generally do not use particularly promotional styles of writing.

Some media advisories announce “good news” events. For example, if hockey legend Wayne Gretzky is coming to your college or university to present 30 scholarships worth \$30,000 to allow boys and girls to attend summer hockey camp, your advisory would note this, along with information about the place and time. But be careful with more significant news. If you are sending a media advisory to invite reporters to a news conference on a controversial topic, be very careful not to provide too much information about the content of the news conference. Just note the topic:

Announcement of the results of a six-month investigation into allegations of financial mismanagement in City Hall.

Save the details for the news conference itself. If you give too much advance information, you’ll read about the findings of your report in the morning edition of the newspaper on the day of the news conference.

MEDIA ADVISORY MEMO This media advisory provides basic information as a way of inviting reporters to cover the activity.

Perez Fernan de Ayala
New Mexico State Senate



123 Mission Boulevard
Albuquerque, N.Mex. 12345
(505) 123-4567

Children’s Health: Our Most Precious Resource

ALBUQUERQUE, N.Mex. – State Sen. Perez Fernan de Ayala will chair an assembly panel that will hear from actor Niles O’Sullivan as well as health experts and families of children suffering from autism. O’Sullivan stars in the popular TV series “Emergency Room Physician.” In real life the actor, who resides in Taos, is the father of an autistic 7-year-old boy.

The hearing will take place on Thursday, Sept. 18, at 10 a.m. in Room 780 of the State Office Building. The hearing, “Children’s Health: Our Most Precious Resource,” will review prevention and research efforts to address the growing problem of childhood autism.

Autism is a disorder that causes children to withdraw from contact with others and slows their physical, emotional and intellectual development. In extreme cases, sufferers completely retreat from all human contact. Currently about 1 in 5,000 children – three-fourths of them boys – are autistic, but the number has been growing in recent years. Autism has been linked to genetic brain dysfunction, though some studies show a correlation with both pre-natal care and early nurturing.

WHO: Sen. Perez Fernan de Ayala
Actor Niles O’Sullivan
Childhood Autism Foundation president Dr. Marion Finster

WHAT: Hearing on “Children’s Health: Our Most Precious Resource”
Interview opportunities, approximately noon and 3 p.m.

WHEN: Thursday, Sept. 18, 10 a.m.

WHERE: 780 Senate Office Building

Sen. Fernan de Ayala, Mr. O’Sullivan, and Dr. Finster will be available for media interviews during scheduled breaks in the senate hearings.

Public Advisories

In emergency situations, organizations may wish to use news channels to communicate directly with media audiences on matters of public interest. For example, a law enforcement agency may report a scam artist preying on elderly homeowners, or a hospital may issue a warning about an outbreak of hepatitis. On these occasions, a public advisory is issued. This is a direct announcement in which an organization matter-of-factly warns media audiences of potential or imminent harm. Public advisories are brief, factual statements, often listing a telephone contact.

Exhibit 7.2—PUBLIC ADVISORY MEMO This public advisory is written directly to the media audience as a warning from the organization.

PAKISTANI-AMERICAN FRIENDSHIP COMMITTEE

123 Park Lane ☎ Central City Xx 12345

To: Editors and News Directors
 From: Hassan al-Haq
 Date: December 12, 2003
 Re: Public Advisory

The Pakistani-American Friendship Committee is warning residents of Central City that people unrelated to the organization are misleadingly using its name to solicit money.

A man and a woman have been reported going door-to-door asking for money, claiming to be raising funds for a relief effort for refugees in Central Asia. The Pakistani-American Friendship Committee does not collect money door-to-door, nor does it authorize anyone to do so on its behalf. Therefore, residents are advised not to give any money to these people.

Both the Central City Police Department and the State Police have been notified.

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Story Idea Memos

Except for community newspapers and trade publications, most news publications are reluctant to use feature stories written by public relations people. Instead, editors prefer to assign their own reporters to write features. Nevertheless, public relations writers can use *story idea memos* (also called *tip sheets* or *interview opportunities*) as a means to invite editors and news directors to develop features about interesting people associated with their organization. Often the focus is on the interviewee's activities outside the organization. This kind of story idea memo lets journalists know that you are aware of them and their audiences, even if those stories you suggest have little direct involvement with your organization except for the possibility of being associated with interesting people. Exhibit 7.3 is an example of a typical story idea memo that directs the focus away from the organization.

Some public relations practitioners try to provide the media with these ideas on a regular basis. In doing so, they strengthen their own relationship with reporters and keep their organization's name before its publics. Here are some of the kinds of story ideas that might find their way into a story idea memo:

The society matron who has spent 15 years volunteering at your soup kitchen

The teacher at your school who each summer takes groups of children from single-parent families on backpacking trips

The new guy in marketing who is training for the Olympics as a speed skater

The graduate of your college who just won an Emmy for her work as a television writer

STORY IDEA MEMO This story idea memo does not provide as much information as a news release because it is intended merely to pique the editor's interest in sending a reporter to do an interview and develop a feature story. Note that the company gets only a passing mention in this memo, as the focus of the eventual feature story would be on the person rather than the company.

One Franklin Park West
East Bay Xx, 12345
(123) 456-7890
www.comcorpr.com

COMCOR, INC.

INNOVATIONS IN ELECTRONICS FOR THE NEW MILLENNIUM

To: Editors and News Directors
From: Rolf Pfennighauser, ComCor, Inc.
Date: March 24, 2002
Re: Interview Opportunity

When Paul Walbrewster was playing center for his high school basketball team, his focus was to win regardless of the effort involved. The competitive spirit kept him going, and he would spend long hours training and practicing. This determination carried him and the East Bay Oysters to the state championships.

Today Paul is in a wheelchair, the legacy of an automobile accident. But don't call Paul a victim. "It's more like—I'm a survivor," he says. "I don't have time to feel victimized."

This 35-year-old maintains an active training schedule at O'Malley's Gym. He coaches a basketball team for boys and girls with physical handicaps at the East Side Community Center. And he is adjusting to his new promotion as senior sales representative for ComCor Electronics.

If you wish to interview Paul, you may contact him through the ComCor Communications Office at (123) 456-7890.

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Pitch Letters

Related to story idea memos, pitch letters are directed to media gatekeepers to entice them to do a story or interview on some aspect of an organization. Story idea memos are understated; they let the information content engage an editor. But there is nothing subtle about a pitch letter. It is unmistakably a sales letter, an attempt to attract the attention of an editor or news director.

An effective pitch letter tries to entice the editor, not with wild exaggerations but rather with enthusiasm and confidence about your program or product. It addresses the benefits to the media if they do the story rather than the advantage to the organization. And it provides a wrap-up, usually with a promise to follow the letter with a telephone call to see if the media has any interest in the issue.

Exhibit 7.4 is an example of a pitch letter designed to get your a client on a television talk show. With slight changes, it could easily be used to invite an interview or to ask for photo coverage of a speech.

A particular kind of pitch letter is a *query letter*, usually written by freelance writers. Queries propose a story idea to magazine editors or television producers and inquire about their interest in it. Public relations writers occasionally use query letters, or they may assist a freelance writer in querying an editor or producer.

PITCH LETTER: “MORNING WITH MARMADUKE” This pitch letter is an enthusiastically written attempt to persuade an editor to invite someone to be a guest on a television talk show.

Cartier Communications

8033 Thyma Circle

Fort McHenry, Md 21345

(123) 456-7890



Carlton Kleinhans
Producer
“Morning With Marmaduke”
WWWW-TV3

Dear Mr. Kleinhans:

Senator Veronica Collingsward is known as one of the “toughest cookies” in the State Senate. Admirers call her “tenacious” and “resourceful.” What opponents call her can’t be spoken on local television.

Senator Collingsward has investigated dozens of cases of fraud against nursing home residents. Once, she went undercover, posing as an Alzheimer’s patient. The information she gathered helped her colleagues in the Senate pass the Collingsward-O’Halleron bill to establish minimum standards for employees and volunteers at adult day-care facilities.

Without doubt, viewers of your “Morning With Marmaduke” program would be very interested in seeing Senator Collingsward. Given the right promotion – and we are prepared to assist your station on this – her guest appearance could be one of your highest-watched segments.

I will contact you this week about arranging an appearance by Senator Collingsward on “Morning With Marmaduke.”

Sincerely,
Matilda Cartier Constantino
Vice President, Cartier Communications