

## The New Rules of PR

Contributed by David Meerman Scott  
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### The Old Days

In the old days, a press release was-shockingly-actually a release to the press. Before the Web, the only reason you issued a press release was to get the media to write about you. Here were "Ye Olde Press Release Rules":

- Nobody saw the actual press release except a handful of reporters and editors.

- You had to have significant news before you were allowed to write a press release.

- A release had to include quotes from third parties, such as customers, analysts and experts.
- The only way your buyers would learn about the press release's content was if the media wrote a story about it.
- The only way to measure the effectiveness of press releases was through "clip books," which collected articles every time the media deigned to pick up your release.

Well, no more. The Web has transformed the rules, and you must transform your releases to make the most of the Web-enabled marketplace of ideas.

### Why You Need to Learn the New Rules

Today, savvy marketing professionals use press releases to reach buyers directly. Many marketing and PR people understand that press releases sent over the wires appear in near real time on services like Google News. But very few understand the implication that they must dramatically alter their press-release strategy if they are to maximize the effectiveness of the press release as a channel for directly communicating with consumers.

The media has been disintermediated. The Web has changed the rules. Buyers read your press releases directly, and you need to be speaking their language.

This is not to suggest that media relations are no longer important; mainstream media and the trade press must be part of an overall communications strategy. In some businesses, mainstream media and the trade press remain critically important. And, of course, the media still derives some of its content from press releases.

But your primary audience is no longer just a handful of journalists. Your audience is millions of people with Internet connections and access to search engines and RSS readers.

### The New Rules of Press Releases

- Don't just send press releases when "big news" is happening; find good reasons to send them all the time.

- Instead of just targeting a handful of journalists, create press releases that appeal directly to your buyers.
- Write releases replete with keyword-rich copy.
- Create links in releases to deliver potential customers to landing pages on your Web site.
- Optimize press release delivery for searching and browsing.
- Drive people into the sales process with press releases.

#### An Example of the New Rules in Action

Let me tell you a story.

I speak regularly at conferences and seminars. In fall 2005, I was preparing a speech called "Shorten your sales cycle: Marketing programs that deliver more revenue faster." To be honest, I was procrastinating. Facing a blank PowerPoint file, I decided to hit on Google in search of inspiration.

I entered the phrase "accelerate sales cycle" to see if there was anything interesting I could use in my presentation. The highest ranked listings for this phrase on Google were from WebEx, a company that provides online collaboration services. What was most interesting was that the links pointed to press releases on the WebEx site.

Then I went over to Google News and checked out the same phrase-"accelerate sales cycle"-and sure enough, WebEx also had the number one listing with a very recent press release dated September 28, 2005: "Application Integration Industry Leader Optimizes Marketing and Sales Processes with WebEx Application Suite." The press release, about a WebEx customer, had been sent through PRNewswire and had a direct Web link to the WebEx site to provide additional information.

There's more. WebEx also provided links in some press releases directly to free trial offers of their services. How cool is that?

WebEx provided me with a great example of a company that had optimized the content of press releases to include relevant terms such as the one I entered. This is a terrific example of the new rules of press releases in action.

## Reaching Your Buyers Directly

Under the old rules, the only way to get "published" was to have your press release "picked up" by the media.

We've come a long way. The Web has turned all kinds of companies, nonprofits, and even rock bands and political campaigners, into just-in-time and just-right publishers. Organizations-the new publishers-create press releases that deliver useful information directly onto the screens of their buyers.

Until recently, nobody ever thought of companies as publishers; newspapers and magazines published the news. But that's changing. Self-publishing-Web-style-has moved into the mainstream, and organizations large and small are doing the publishing... via press releases.

As you are making this fundamental shift, what should you write press releases about? Big news is great, but don't wait. Write about just about anything that your organization is doing:

- CEO speaking at a conference? Write a release.
- Win an award? Write a release.
- Have a new take on an old problem? Write a release.
- Add a product feature? Write a release.
- Win a new customer? Write a release.
- Publish a white paper? Write a release.
- Get out of bed this morning? OK, maybe not... but you are thinking the right way now!

## Think Like a Publisher

To implement a successful press release strategy, think like a publisher. Marketers at the most enlightened organizations recognize that they are now purveyors of information, and they manage content as a valuable asset with the care of a publishing company.

One of the most important things that publishers do is start with a content strategy and then focus on the mechanics and design of delivering that content. Publishers carefully identify and define target audiences and consider what content is required to meet their needs.

Publishers consider questions like these: Who are my readers? How do I reach them? What are their motivations? What are the problems I can help them solve? How can I entertain them and inform them at the same time? What content will compel them to purchase what I have to offer?

Just don't wait for the media to talk. If you craft and deliver your press releases effectively, in today's Web context you will reach your constituents directly. There's no doubt that in the Web economy, press releases drive action and make those who create them successful.

David Meerman Scott is the author of *Cashing In With Content: How Innovative Marketers Use Digital Information to Turn Browsers Into Buyers*. Contact him at [www.davidmeermanscott.com](http://www.davidmeermanscott.com).