

AbaF

Writing an effective media release

What is a media release?

A media release is like a short newspaper article, a clear and sharply focused presentation of the main attributes of your event or news item, with a 'news hook', used to gain coverage in the media.

A 'news hook' or 'angle' is the main narrative theme of your news item or event that you're pitching to a journalist. It should be the primary focus of the information presented. The 'news hook' can be the theme of the work, key attributes of the artist who created it, the context of the work, a historical perspective, an announcement of a competition win or anniversary.

The 'media release' (or press release – these terms are interchangeable) has a generally accepted format and is used to sell your story to a journalist. Used for print (newspaper and magazine), broadcast (radio and television) and online media, the release should be attention-grabbing, informative and creative enough to attract both interest and inquiry from the reader.

This Fact Sheet contains a fictitious sample media release to illustrate how one is written and the points below provide an outline of a standard presentation. The sample shows the structure, language, length, tone and amount of information required, as well as an outline of the follow-up process after it's sent.

Media release structure and level of information required

A good media release should be written on one **A4 sheet of paper**, have a clearly defined structure and contain the following information in more or less the same order as listed below.

The release should have large margins (so journalists can print it out and make notes) and they have a fairly consistent structure and formula, based around '**the inverted pyramid of information**'. If you imagine the structure of information in an inverted triangle format, the most important information is placed at the top of the media release (the widest part of the triangle) and the less important information at the bottom.

This is for two reasons:

- Journalists are always busy and they receive hundreds of media releases every day by email. If your media release captures one minute of their attention, you're doing well, (indeed, if they actually open your email, it's your lucky day!). They will be scanning the media release to see if they're interested in doing a story, so it's vital that they don't have to hunt through the release for the vital information. A critical detail such as the timeframe of an event will be a make or break factor in their decision to take up the story, so make sure it's easy to locate.
- If an editor decides to reprint your media release verbatim, as a print or online article, the article can be easily resized by the editor to fit the publication's word count by removing secondary information at the bottom of the media release.

The Structure of a Media Release

1. The heading '**MEDIA RELEASE**' (or '**PRESS RELEASE**') needs to be at the top in bold, all capital letters in a larger font size than the main body of text.
2. **The date** plus either '**For immediate release**' or '**Embargoed until X time on Y date**'.
 - Immediate Release - information can be published or broadcast in the media immediately and about 98% of media releases are for immediate release.
 - Under Embargo - is used when the information needs to be supplied to the media to meet their deadlines but shouldn't be released in the public sphere until a later date or time. For example, your media release may announce you have won an important art prize that is being announced in the evening but you need to let the media know earlier in the day so they can meet their deadlines.
3. A **succinct headline** that has the key focus or '**news hook**' of the release. The headline is the attention-grabbing part of the release and could be the only part that is read by the journalist, so ensure that you capture the essence of your story in it. If appropriate, get the date and location of the exhibition in the headline, while also giving a flavour of the work.

TIP: Work with the key words from your press release and combine them to create a punchy headline.

4. The '**news hook**' or '**story angle**' is the central theme or narrative focus of the media release and this should be clearly stated. The news hook will point to some of the **key messages** of what you wish to communicate in your campaign. A key message is an item of information that needs to be conveyed in your media releases, the interviews done by your spokesperson etc. Your campaign might have anything up to about six key messages.

TIP: In distilling your 'news hook', ask yourself, what is my story really about? What is its main theme?

5. The **introductory paragraph with the 5 W's** is the most important paragraph and must be at the top of the media release. It informs the reader of the 'who', 'what', 'when', 'where' and 'why' of the subject of the media release.

TIP: When you write this paragraph, imagine that it's the only paragraph that the journalist might read and you must have all details in it.

6. The second paragraph expands on the first and is a summary or short 'teaser' of the story, just one or two sentences, a bit of detail about the event or story. Sometimes this teaser paragraph is not necessary.
7. A quote from a credible source relevant to the subject of the press release. Peppered throughout the media release, quotes are extremely useful. In the sample media release three quotes have been used – they provide varied perspectives and give weight to back up and strengthen the credibility of the release.

Quotes are important for the media because:

- the journalist writing an article may not be able to do an interview, there are quotes available for inclusion
- if the release gets reprinted or posted online verbatim, it is in the form of an article.

Quotes typically originate from three sources:

- an artist, who talks about their work – its genesis, themes or techniques etc (it's always best if the artist actually explains his or her work but his or her gallerist can do this also).
- gallery owner, a collector or someone prominent in the visual arts world - who can contextualise the artist in the art world. For example, highly collectable artist, hot new talent on the rise, a major anniversary, a new acquisition or artist winning a prize
- newspaper critic - a great quote from a previous exhibition will provide a wonderful testimonial. If you have it, use it!

TIP: Media work around **context, controversy and timing**. It's very useful to contextualize your story and tie your 'news hook' to a broader context of what you are publicising, which could be a current news item or relevant issue in the media. For example, if your work deals with racism perhaps you could cite a statistic taken from a recent news article.

8. The **context** of the artwork can be stated through a short paragraph or in a quote. We have used a quote in this sample release to illustrate the context of the story.
9. **Background information** about the artist. Use this section to build the profile of the artist, don't use too many adjectives, stick to the facts and don't repeat information.
10. In the final paragraph ensure all **event information** is included: dates, gallery details, URLs, price, time etc.
11. **Contact details for media liaison**. You should include all contact details for the person responsible for media liaison and make sure that they are available to take the calls.
12. **Further background information**. In the pages following your media release, you may wish to include further background information about the artist or exhibition, a full artist biography, map of the venue, artist statement, image sheets etc. Make sure that it is accurate and succinct – the information should assist the journalist in their research to write their story.

The language and tone of a media release

- Write for your audience, so have a good idea of your media targets. Ideally you want to find the middle ground between overly complex language and the 'dumbed down' description: be accessible.
- Use metaphors to paint a picture, for example, 'Andy Warhol meets Nigella Lawson', this will help to create a word picture for your audience, give a flavor of your story.
- Only use specific terminology if it's pertinent (you might wish to include a short definition of its meaning in brackets, if appropriate).
- Avoid the use of too many superlatives and avoid hype, as your story might potentially lose credibility and journalists will quickly reject this type of news pitch.
- Avoid jargon, fancy or fluffy language or lots of adjectives.
- Do not say anything that is not true.

Images for a media kit and campaign

You must have great images for print media to accompany your story. Sometimes editors will not run a story, no matter how interesting it is, if there is not a good image to accompany it.

Think about your subject as a photo story. Send in your photo as a low res image pasted into the release or media kit. You will need a high res version available to send through (quickly) if requested. Images for a media kit or campaign:

- must be good quality, not blurry and with plenty of contrast and strong colour.
- must be in a 'reportage' story – they must illustrate the story, preferably with a person or people in them than without.

- must consider orientation because publications are orientated in a 'portrait' format, they are preferable to 'landscape' orientation and this allows room for a masthead as well, if your image is used for a magazine cover.
- can be downloadable from a website
- may not be used by some newspapers and magazines who will want to take their own images.

Sending out the media kit

- Most journalists prefer to receive media releases by email – but don't send huge file attachments (it's very annoying and some media outlets have firewalls). Try to keep them under 1Mb.
- It's helpful to divide your media data base into 2 sections. The most important journalists you might want to send a direct targeted pitch to, so send an individual email to them with the attached PDF of the media kit; the second (and larger group), simply send the media release or media kit to yourself and include the journalist's details in the BCC field. Never send CC.
- Include the text of the release in the body of the email.
- Post a PDF of the media kit onto your website or blog site with the hyperlink in the body of an email. You can still paste the media release into the body of the same email.
- Include all news wire services - AAP, Reuters etc – in your email list.
- You'll need to follow-up with an email and or a phone call.

Targeting your media release

- It is important that you know the readership or listenership profile of the media outlets you are targeting. Watch and listen to the television or radio program or read the magazine, newspaper or online publications that you would like to get mentioned on or in.
- When sending a direct pitch, it's important that you get a name to direct your release to. It is fine to call reception and say that you have a story to pitch and would like the name and direct email address for the relevant journalist. You can also use this as an opportunity to check that the team is not on deadline.
- You need only write one release, and then in the body of an email write a targeted pitch to the journalist, suggesting why they might be interested in this story or interview opportunity.
- Check the different sections of a media outlet you're targeting and approach the journalist responsible for a particular column or section of a publication or program.
- Competing outlets want different angles, so target your story angles to the most appropriate publications.

Timelines for media outlets

It is essential to get your media release to the media outlet - **art magazines, daily newspapers, glossy magazines, radio and television** - in a timely manner. Finding out 'when?' is a critical part of your research prior to sending out your media release. For many publications this information is available online, for others you may need to send an email enquiry or telephone to find out the regular print or broadcast deadlines.

As a guide the deadlines for:

- glossy magazines: four - six months prior for an article
- weekly magazines: four - six weeks prior for an article
- websites can be daily, weekly or monthly dependant on the format
- newspapers: national and metro dailies, Sunday papers: at least three weeks prior
- radio: more immediate – three weeks to the day before, depending on the regularity of the program and 'newsworthiness' of the story (feature, news item etc)

TIP: Create a media database (excel spreadsheet is fine) with all the deadline information and contact details of your target publications so that you can easily monitor when you should send you media releases. www.mediabay.com.au is a free media directory and great place to start.

Following up with the media

Following up with reporters by phone or e-mail where appropriate is as important as sending the release itself. Why? Because maybe the reporter didn't receive the email, hasn't read his or her e-mail yet, or the headline for the release sent via wire services just didn't engage him or her enough to want to read the release in the first place. Or maybe the release wasn't sent to any one reporter in particular, which is always a no-no.¹

Fear is the number one reason why most people avoid making contact with the media. However if you've taken the time to target the right reporter, study their news beat and the types of stories they prefer, and adhere to their deadlines, you should have nothing to fear in picking up the phone and calling a reporter.²

TIP: Reporters are very busy people so it's fine to allow two days before following up.

When you have the journalist on the phone:

- Do ask if it is an OK time to talk (a reporter on deadline will not be as receptive to discussing ideas as they could be when they have more time).³
- Do take time to listen to what the reporter says during your conversation. If you listen closely, the reporter may indicate interest and what your next directives should be. For example, you'll discover whether or not you need to conduct a second follow up.⁴
- Do make note as to whether your release has been forwarded to another reporter. If this turns out to be the case, then prepare to contact the new reporter with your story idea, but follow these steps again.⁵
- Do accept "No" gracefully. When a reporter says "No" to your story, accept the fact that he or she has a good reason, at least at that particular point in time. You should never try to push a reporter into running your story because you will run the risk of alienating that reporter forever. The timing or story angle may be wrong or perhaps he or she wrote a story on a similar topic recently. You can also ask what sort of stories they are interested in and make a note of that for future reference.⁶

TIP: Role play with a colleague or friend the conversation with the journalist before you call for the first time, make sure you have the key facts ready and are able to communicate clearly and easily.

Making the most of the coverage offered

Once you have been published, make sure to take some copies and collate your media clippings. This is essential; they become the best testimonials for further marketing, development and grant acquittals. They are used for:

- Information packs to agents, galleries, presenters and other potential buyers of your work.
- Sponsorship proposals.
- Quotes to use in brochures.
- Website – post a link on your site or have a PR section
- Frame a copy of the coverage and hang on the wall or start PR book
- Social Networking, post your coverage on Facebook, twitter etc

Resources and further reading

- Caroll Michels, *How to Survive and Prosper as an Artist: Selling Yourself Without Selling Your Soul (Paperback)* Holt Paperbacks; 6 edition (June 9, 2009)
- Linda B VandeVrede, *Press Releases Are Not a PR Strategy*, VandeVrede Public Relations, LLC; 2nd edition (March 9, 2007)
- Julius Vitali, *The Fine Artist's Guide to Marketing and Self-Promotion: Innovative Techniques to Build Your Career as an Artist (Paperback)* Allworth Press; Revised edition (August 1, 2003)
- Jackie Battenfield, *The Artist's Guide: How to Make a Living Doing What You Love*, Da Capo Press (June 9, 2009)

1.2.3.4.5.6 Caroline Moncel , "Life After Press Release distribution",
http://www.motiontemps.com/article_0603.html



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SAMPLE MEDIA RELEASE 1 – Heading in capitals

For immediate release - 1 June 2010 2 - Release date

From hippie surf culture to global tourist mecca: Deborah Baxter's photographic exhibition '*Barefoot Bondi*' reveals Bondi at its edge. Fusion Gallery, Sydney, opens 1 August 2010 3 - Short sharp headline

Deborah Baxter's forthcoming show *Barefoot Bondi* at the Fusion Gallery, Sydney (1 - 30 August 2010) is her 10th solo photographic exhibition. A prolific artist, Baxter's latest exhibition of 30 large black and white prints traces a detailed 15 year period, between 1975-1990, which saw Australia's most loved icon - Bondi Beach – suffering overcrowding, rampant consumerism and almost being 'loved to death'. 4 - News hook or story angle Technically intricate, each piece shows the natural beauty of the beach contrasted with the irreversible impact of development and shows social disharmony simmering just below the surface. Her representational portrait-based photographs all depict locals and tourists in contrasting abstracted backgrounds. 5 - The Five W's, Who, What, When, Where, Why

The exhibition marks an important timeframe in the development of the image of Australia's famous beach. A drawcard for international tourists, Bondi-culture has a milieu all of its own. Now, a billion dollar global tourist mecca, the crowds, overdevelopment and pollution threaten the natural environment and lifestyles of the locals, particularly the urban hippie, fashion and surf subcultures. 6 - Teaser paragraph

"I began photographing Bondi at a pivotal time in its development as an international tourist icon. Not knowing it then, I had started to record its changing face and culture," says Deborah Baxter. "I wanted to show in the faces of the people I photographed how social change was impacting directly in their everyday lives. We see this tension all over the world when the potential to earn tourist income outweighs local needs." 7 - Artist's quote explains the theme of the work

Director of The Fusion Gallery, John Jones says that "this exhibition shows a fascinating insight into Australia's beach culture, how we see ourselves individually and culturally. Deborah Baxter's work captures the way our cultural identity is construed around the beach. Her previous exhibition sold out which shows that she's an extremely talented artist engaging in a subject matter that's hitting the pulse. She's one of Australia's most collective artists today." 8 - A gallerist's quote shows art world context

"Society in the 1970's was critical of surfing subculture and surfers were seen as drop-out hippies," adds Baxter. Now the entire Bondi area has become an industry in its own right. Consumerism now dominates this surfer's paradise and brings overcrowding, pollution and lack of accessibility. I hope we can all learn from this." 8 - Artist's quote sets the context of the work

"Deborah Baxter's highly original work reveals the uneasy tension when there are no simple solutions to contemporary social issues. Her skilful use of humour and wit enables the viewer to adjudicate both points of view and delve deeper into the subject matter. She is a master of revelation." (Joe Brown, *New York Times*, 2009). 7 - A media quote – great testimonial

Sydney-based Deborah Baxter has exhibited widely in exhibitions around Australia and internationally, including a recent retrospective at the AGNSW. In 1999 Baxter won the ABC Photography Award and in 2004 she was a finalist in the DEF Photography Prize. Deborah Baxter's work has been published in two award-winning books *The Changing Face of the Beach* and *Architecture of Australia*. She is the Director of The Young Photographers Association and her work features in many Australian and international public and private collections. Baxter began to photograph the city in the mid 70's and still holds a deep passion for urban subject matter today. Her photographs explore people's interaction with the architecture, landscapes and the beaches of Australia and how cultural change impacts on the built, natural and social environments. 9 – Mini bio to build profile of the artist

Deborah Baxter, *Barefoot Bondi*, 1-30 August 2010, www.barefootbondi.com.au, Fusion Gallery, 61 Oxford
Sydney, Tues-Sun, 11am-5pm. p: 9999 9999, www.fusiongallerysydney.com.au. **10 - Exhibition info**

MEDIA: for interviews & images contact Mary Smith, 02 1234 5678, mary@smithpr.com, 0400 000 000 **11- Media liaison details for follow-up** **12 Supplementary info can be included in subsequent pages of the media kit.**