Many small business enterprises believe that the media already knows about their story and will seek them out for a full article. Business enterprises may shy away from crafting and sending press releases to avoid dealing with the media.

However, information about your business, your new products, your new hires, etc., is probably not going to get passed on as a news tip by someone else. So you can, and should, be your own press agent, especially in terms of dealing with smaller market media such as small community weekly newspapers.

Sending a press release is easy. You can send a press release representing your business by simply putting a bold “PRESS RELEASE” at the top of the empty portion of your letterhead stationery. What you write should address these factors: What has happened. Who was involved (include addresses). What it means (include a quote from the company owner). What happens next (if a new product, when available and where). Think of the five Ws and one H: who, what, where, when, why and how.

Maintain your media list. Some media prefer to receive releases by fax; some by mail and still others by e-mail. It is important, when first establishing your media list, to know how various outlets prefer to receive press releases. Most states have a state newspaper association online. This is a good place to look for e-mail addresses, fax numbers and mailing addresses for newspapers in your immediate area and a good start for your media contacts. If your business is primarily local or regional, use addresses in your local and regional area. Do not send your release to the entire state if you can only service a local area.

Secondly, think about other outlets for your releases to add to your contact list. Radio stations are another good addition. If your release is consumer-focused, conduct online searches for radio stations in your state or area. If your release is ag focused, pull the National Farm Broadcasters list and then include those stations in your state or region for your media contacts list. Then think about other periodicals, magazines, etc., with readers you may want to target. What farm magazines or consumer publications, trade publications, etc., do you read? Which would be a good fit for your news?

As a business entrepreneur, you know the value of being recognized in the press or by other media. It helps to be noticed (free advertising), but it also helps to establish your business or product credibility. These are some points to remember:

• You use press releases only when you have something that deserves to be noticed. This is not the forum for opinions or issue stands – at least not those associated with marketing your company.

• Focus on what makes your news newsworthy. Is it a new product? Is it better than the competition? Is it endorsed by a celebrity or noteworthy person? Would this news appeal to a wide audience and not just those involved in the day-to-day operations of the business?

• Things that are different are generally more interesting to the general public, therefore more interesting to media. Are you hiring new people during an economic downswing? Are you introducing another new product line? Have you expanded into a non-local market?

• If a photo applies, supply it.

• Send your release early in the week and early in the day to maximize exposure throughout the week from daily and weekly newspapers. Follow up with phone calls to specific reporters, if necessary and warranted by the release topic, to make sure they received your release and let them know you are available for additional questions.
• Be available once you have sent out a press release. You will have blown an opportunity now – and maybe next time as well – if you aren’t available to answer questions or take advantage of something the media may wish to expand on.

• Don’t feel defeated if your first media release doesn’t create interest. Continue to send releases. If nothing else, your local media will know you exist. Who can predict when that might turn to your advantage?

• Proofread everything that goes out. NO MISTAKES!

• Adding -30- at the very bottom of your release signifies the end of the release to media. You can then add “photo included,” or other pertinent information to the release that you have not already stated.

Below is a sample form that will work for many items of news about your product or business. You will want to add paragraphs to flesh out the story angle for the media. If they want more, they will contact you. Your media contact list does not have to be lengthy or detailed. However, it needs to be accurate and give contact information if the media wish to pursue it further.

Outline of a Press Release

(Your company letterhead or stationary)

PRESS RELEASE

For release ________________________________

(date)

For further information, contact _________________________________________

(name, phone, fax, email)

_______________________________ has announced _________________________________

(city, state, your company name)                        (what event, product, change, creation)

The _______________________ will involve _________________________________________

(action)                                               (number of people, companies, etc.)

_____________________________________________________________________________

(list any pertinent information such as national or community statistics, recent quotes, a quote from a local politician, etc.)

Insert additional paragraphs as needed to describe the product or newsworthy item, quotes from the CEO, contacts for purchase or additional information and anything else deemed necessary.

-30-

* Reprinted with permission from the Ag Marketing Resource Center, Iowa State University Extension.