

June 2004

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SOME OTHER TOOLS

This newsletter had a lot to say about speeches, OpEds, and press releases, but these certainly aren't the only forms of writing that can communicate your message effectively to key audiences. This month we take a look at a few others.

- [1] Pitch letters: Nothing at all to do with press releases
- [2] Letters to the Editor: Short and to the point
- [3] PowerPoint: Okay, it can be effective

1. Pitch letters: Nothing at all to do with press releases

B.L. Ochman, Internet marketing specialist, (BLOchman@whatsnextonline.com) says, "Press releases are a colossal waste of time." That's going too far, but she makes a larger point that's right on: a well crafted pitch letter to a media outlet can be a heck of a lot more effective than a press release in getting press coverage.

To write a good pitch, start by (you guessed it) getting to the point fast. Tell the reporter or editor **IN THE FIRST SENTENCE** why you're writing. Editors are incredibly busy, and if they have to wade through text, they won't.

In the next two sentences, explain why you're presenting a story idea or recommending an interview. Make sure you come up with a good reason why your idea is newsworthy. That's what editors live for. Screenwriters who pitch movies try to boil down their plot to the two-sentence description that would appear in a TV Guide listing. You should shoot for something similar.

Once you've grabbed an editor's attention with three well-done sentences, you can expand a bit. Give yourself a paragraph or two to say why your idea would make a good story, what it involves, and how you or your organization could help the reporter with sources, background, etc. Save any additional details for the background material you'll give a reporter once he or she expresses interest.

One last piece of advice, Ochman warns against hype words like "first, only, greatest, biggest." Reporters' antennae are attuned to search out and reject exaggerations.

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<http://www.porrollc.com/results.html>

2. Letters to the Editor: Short and to the point

I like to say that LTEs are like OpEds, only more so. By that I mean they have to be really, really short, getting to the point with lightning speed. Whatever you do, don't try to make an LTE cover too many much. That's the most common mistake organizations make.

Instead, use an LTE to make ONE single point and make it briefly--two paragraphs at most. Take issue with one particular point in a story or an editorial. Don't try to advance your entire agenda. My rule of thumb is that the longer a LTE is, the less likely it is to get published.

Also, one style tip. Include a reference to the article to which you're responding. ("In your July 6 article on President Reagan, your reporter said....")

That helps make the LTE editor's job easier, and increases your odds of getting into print.

3. PowerPoint: Okay, it can be effective

If you've read previous issues, you know that I worry about the dangerous effects PowerPoint can have on speeches. But--like nuclear power--it can be also be used for good. Here are a couple tips.

Discover the power of animation: I'm not talking about putting in cartoons, but simple stuff--like learning how to use mouse clicks to make 6 points appear on the screen, one by one, or using a click to make a picture or chart appear under a headline. Without animation, the audience will read through all the text on the screen while you're speaking, instead of listening to your speech.

Go light on text:--I must admit this was tough for me at first, because I'm much more a words person than a visual guy. But lots of words on a slide, means lots of eyes and attention diverted from you and what you're saying.