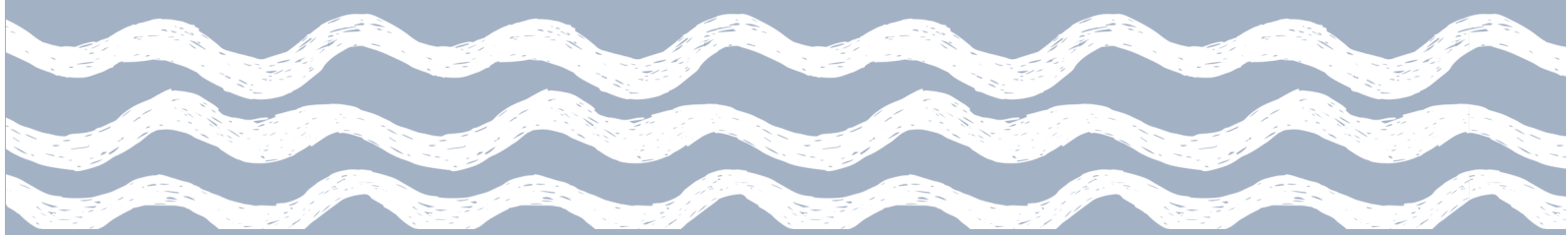


Arts Media CONTACTS

How to Write a Press Release
in the Digital Age



How to write...

A PRESS RELEASE IN THE DIGITAL AGE

By Jessica Wood, *arts journalist and director
of specialist PR agency, Arts Media Contacts.*

Drafting press releases is quite a different art to writing other marketing materials such as brochures, websites and catalogue essays, as the sell is to the media and not the public. The purpose is to persuade journalists your event is newsworthy and of interest to their audience so they run a feature on it.

The best thing to do when starting out is to imagine how the journalist will respond when they read it. As they open your document on their laptop they will be asking themselves these questions: 1) Is this a genuinely newsworthy event? 2) Is it right for my readers or audience? 3) Do I have all the assets – properly researched information and images – to produce a good feature? 4) Does this event fit time-wise into my schedule?

Whether they are working in regional television, national newspapers or specialist magazines, journalists

know their audience; they have their briefs and are looking for stories to fit. From the first word – the subject line of the email, the headline and the first two sentences – your press release needs to clearly spell out that this event is perfect for their readership. Think about your own in-box and the clutter on your smart phone – we are all drawn to open messages that are relevant and specifically targeted to us.



PICTURE THIS

Then the journalist opens the email, and wow there it is! A powerful image. This is your next biggest challenge. On a recent press trip, a visual art critic I spoke to said that if he didn't like the image on a press release he didn't read it. You will beat the competition with the right image so choose it carefully. Caption it properly too – the full title, the artist's name, date and credit should all be in the file name as well as underneath if possible.

Make doubly sure the image is neither too big nor too large a file size. Big images take ages to download, clog up your phone and – according to settings – can just appear as a little cross in a box. Insert a link to an online folder where journalists can download high resolution images which they can publish. Make sure all copyrights are in place, all credits and captions clearly set out so the journalist doesn't have to spend ages sorting it out.

GET THE TIMING RIGHT

The daily newspaper teams meet every afternoon to decide what goes in the following day; the Sundays need copy by Thursday evening, the glossies can work up to 20 weeks ahead. Every journalist is constantly thinking about dates and deadlines. You will achieve more media coverage simply by sending the press release out at the right time, and Arts Media Contacts can help you with this. Put the date clearly into the subject line so the journalists know it meets their deadlines. If the event has a seasonal theme (e.g. a summer or Christmas



show) then make this quite clear so they slot it into that issue.

WHO WHAT WHY WHEN WHERE

As a journalist, I received countless art press releases that left out crucial information such as whether the 'works' were sculpture, photographs or paintings. Sometimes I had no idea whether the exhibition was massive – a whole warehouse – or just three pictures in the corner of a gallery. Often the artists' name was written as if I should definitely have heard of them even if it was their debut show. So try to describe the exhibition, work or performance from a viewers' point of view. Let the journalist know what the visitors or audience will experience when/if they show up. Give the journalist facts on how big the event is, the reputation of the key performers or artists, number of paintings, audience size, the selling price of the paintings, the names of the judges of a competition. They love and need facts – the more the better. Do not give a vague description of the event with a link to your website (the chances are this might not list all the facts either).

In terms of biographical information it is good to keep this fairly short. Include key facts to



illustrate how important (established or up-and-coming) this artist or performer is. The media needs to know who they are, not their life history. Put in a link to a full bio if you have one so they can find this out if required.

Full listings information should be in the press release as well, including travel and opening hours, website, social media and ticketing links. Place this at the end and include a couple of sentences that can easily be lifted into listings magazines and sites. Include any video you may have as this will greatly increase the chances of the event being used.

QUOTE ME

“

Always include quotes by the artist, curator and other key figures in the event. This is the place in the press release to put intellectual and creative ideas. Artspeak and academic language is fine for artists - just don't use it yourself.

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DIGITAL CHECK LIST

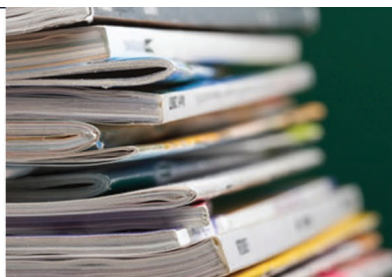
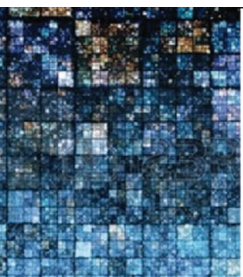


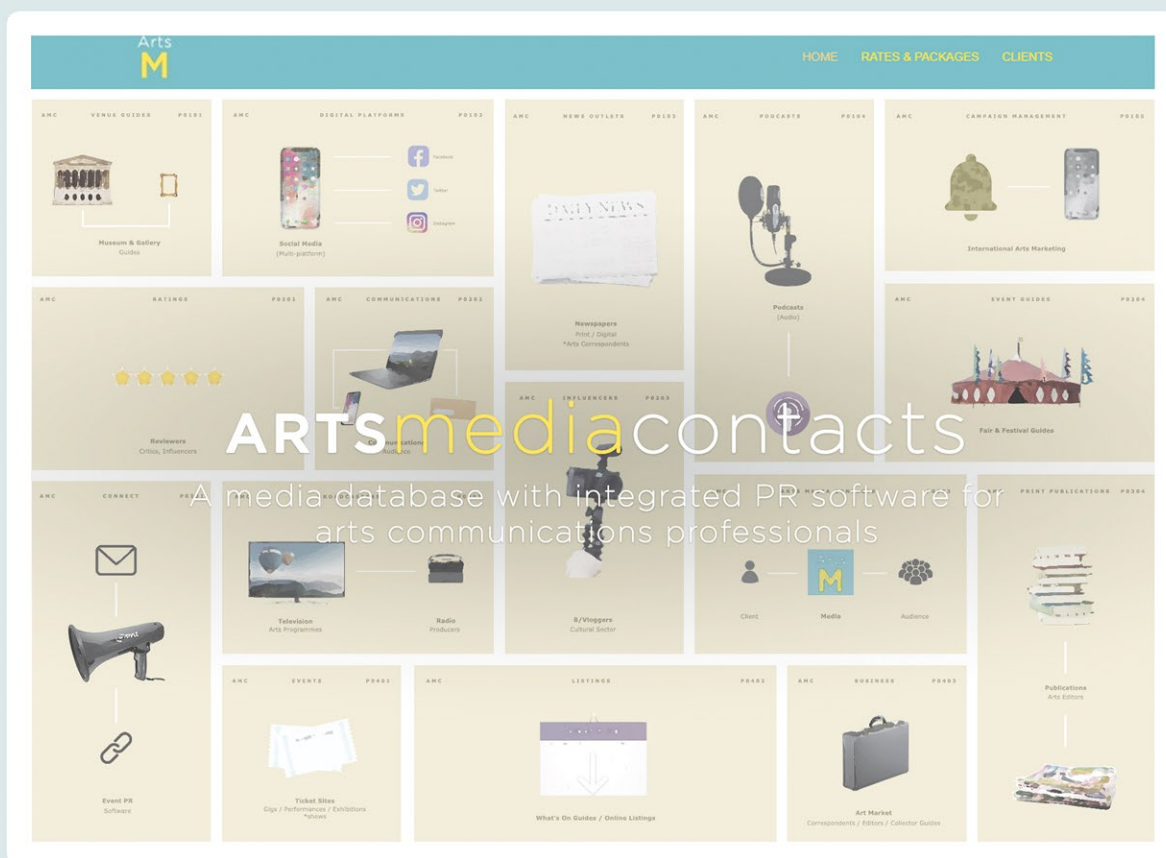
- ✓ Check your headline in Google so there is no clash.
- ✓ Is your headline tweetable (280 characters)?
- ✓ Is your hashtag unique?
- ✓ What appears in the micro-window of browsers and phones before the message is opened? (send test emails to yourself).
- ✓ Include keywords (but not too many or too obviously).
- ✓ Include links and ensure they all work, leading back to web pages that are relevant (back links).
- ✓ Always include relevant social media links.
- ✓ Include video whenever possible.

HOW STRONG IS YOUR PRESS RELEASE

Evaluate the strength of these before hitting send:

Subject line	Video
Headline	Quotes
News angle	Links
Facts	Information
Images	





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