

WHAT BLOGGERS WANT: PODCAST

Narrator: Hi everyone. **We're at PWR New Media and today we're talking with, about press releases in the new media world with John Biggs**, author of *Black Hat: Misfits, Criminals and Scammers in the Internet Age*. John also writes for the *New York Times*, [Crunchgear](#), *Popular Mechanic* and numerous other outlets. His personal blog is [BigWideLogic.com](#). And John, thanks for taking time to talk with us today. We've got a few questions for you and our audience will appreciate any thoughts you can share on the following subjects. So let's get started.

Our clients are always interested in how journalists and bloggers want and use press releases. So, my first question is **how do you use a press release?**

John Biggs: How do I use them? Well **as soon as I get one I will basically use it as a, as a jumping off point for a post or something. They're basically like our little, our little uh peanuts in the Cracker Jack in the early morning so we don't have to go out searching for stories.** So as soon as we get a press release that's uh applicable we'll be able to use that, **we'll actually republish the entire press release** as well sometimes.

N: And, **how to you prefer to receive a press release?**

JB: Well, we don't mind getting the uh actual document, the actual press release document in the traditional form but the real, **the real key is to have images**, a link to images now down at the bottom uh without that we're basically stuck. I mean direct link, **not "go to this website and you might find it somewhere"** which has been happening far too often recently. A specific link to the actual images is really important for bloggers in this case. And I mean **even in my work at the New York Times it's really useful to have press release images** right at the bottom or a link to them. A lot of people complain about embedding things and things like that but at this stage of the game if you can't handle an imbed code in your email then you probably have to, you might want to pack in the typewriter.

N: Exactly. What in your opinion, **what is your opinion about using social media bookmarks on releases?** Is that something you would take advantage of or would that be beneficial to you?

JB: No, not really. I mean building a little social network around a product or a piece of news is going to be kind of, **it doesn't specifically help us** because its not like we're going to be able to spread that information more readily if its on Facebook or whatever. I mean, if you have a, if your organization for example or CEO has a Twitter account or Facebook account or something like that and wants to spread news that way. The only thing that I would be concerned about is that not everybody checks that every day. So you're basically, you could use email, which everybody checks, you could use instant messaging which everybody has on their desktop, or you could use these social network things as sort of a "hey I'm the first CEO who sells widgets using this new technology."

N: So **you don't mind the number of press releases that you may get** one day, you don't mind being inundated sometimes with them...

JB: **We don't specifically mind being inundated. What we do mind is getting a press release maybe 12 hours after it's been announced somewhere else.** That happens quite a bit. We'll get

sort of like this, this afterthought press release that comes out to bloggers or some other list a few hours after the official news has broken elsewhere. So, I mean if you're going to do it do it at the exact moment and **don't work with embargoes** unless there is some kind of special person that you have to impress.

N: **So it's time sensitive?**

JB: **Yea, its very time sensitive especially for us.** I mean, for standard journalism you basically have a nice 5 hour lead time or whatever. Even at the Times or whatever you still have to run through copy editors, you still have to run through editors and things. Whereas **our lead time is approximately 30 seconds** so as soon as it comes out we need to know.

N: Good comment. **Let's talk about comment sections or blog components on an email (release).** How are they useful to you or **are they useful to you?**

JB: **No, not really.** The last thing I want to do its offer direct feedback to a press release. It comes from the ether and should stay in the ether until...

N: You know there has been some ink spilled in recent years suggesting that writers and bloggers especially would prefer releases that were in bullet point format, statement of facts and quotes rather than the written traditional press releases. **Do you have an opinion on how press releases should be written** for maximum utilization?

JB: I'm coming from the product gadget side of things so obviously **my real, real goal would be get as many specs, specifications as possible.** I have no issue with, I don't know, Joe CEO wanting to preen and stroke his ego by giving a quote to the press release that's fine. I mean that's, that's not specifically for us in this case because we usually know that those are **canned quotes** anyway and **we rarely use** those. But really the specs are really the most important, and a pretty **in detailed description of how much the thing is, where it's available, what the thinking was behind it, that sort of thing.** I mean, we all know what the standard, what the standard lead, little bit of a nut graph and then a quote format of press releases and its fine. It doesn't detract from the press release but it doesn't add to it.

N: And, **does it bother you if people you don't know send you releases?** How do you want them to get permission to communicate with you?

JB: Well I mean **ideally they would want to introduce themselves before sending it** to a, before adding us to their mailing list. I mean I get stuff that's completely inappropriate and is essentially just junk mail at that point. And what I've found is that people will find stuff in Lexis Nexus or ... database and things like that and just say "oh hey this guy apparently knows something about RV maintenance so we'll send him our little, I'll send him a little press release" and that's, that basically shows a certain level of disrespect. I mean there are lots and lots of bloggers out there but it's not that difficult to figure out who to talk to and who to pinpoint these things to especially using Google tools, tools like Google Reader, Google news alerts, that sort of thing.

N: **So a really good list from a PR person, somebody that is specifically is looking for you, that's what you want?**

JB: **Yea. The ideal would be to introduce themselves first**, “hey we’re representing this product or this company, that way we can it to our database, our internal database saying who is representing this company and if had something, had a question or whatever we would contact them directly.

N: And, **is it valuable to you to connect with PR people on sites like Twitter or Facebook?**

JB: **Not specifically.** It’s, it’s really, I have enough, I have enough input during the day that I don’t really need to get twitters from folks. The best, the best option I could suggest is actually getting on instant messenger and using that which is a one-to-one sort of, instead of a broadcast sort of thing where you see 128 word, little blurb about some product, I’m more apt to pay attention to someone IM’ing me and telling me, telling me about what they’re up to.

N: That brings us to one final question: **what are the main sources you use to find stories?** You know, other than releases?

JB: **Releases, first we would say releases and then we would say RSS feeds**, we have about, we have a internal list of websites that number in about 200, 300 that we all use to find stories. Then it’s just sort of word of mouth. And then, I mean incidentally we’ll also use like Twitter and different things like that but that’s only just starting to become more interesting. I would say the best, **the best pitches I receive are actually face-to-face**, they’ll come out to my office or I’ll go out to meet them in New York somewhere. You really get a lot of, you really get a lot of traction there because you basically have the product in front of the person and you’re actually describing what it is and even if it requires inviting 5 or 6 people at once to actually fit everybody in it’s still a good idea.

N: **So you still like the one-on-one kind of dealings?**

JB: **In most cases.** I mean there’s a lot of signal to noise that I have to filter out and I try to, I try to be choosy with my time because basically an hour spent not blogging is basically an hour wasted in my, in this profession at this point. So it has to be basically worth the time to go out.

N: Well we want to thank you for your time today and I want to kind of know from you if there is **any other last piece of advice, really important piece of advice that you can share regarding how to find and communicate with successful writers and bloggers like yourself.**

JB: I mean **you basically have to treat them as journalists at this point. The top sites at this point are basically just like newswires and the long tail I guess is, are people who are very interested, in a very specific niche. And also recommend that the CEOs don’t start, go onto blogs and start commenting against negative reviews and different things like that. There are other ways around that, especially by reaching out directly to the blogger and talking to the blogger as opposed to astro-turfing, which happens a lot recently.** It seems that people start flailing out when they see these things. And these things are actually, make a fairly big impression on the blogosphere but **remember that today’s blog post is tomorrow’s fish wrapper** so it doesn’t always stick.

N: **So you’re saying go right, go right to the blogger and talk and...**

JB: **Yea, go right to the blogger and discuss**, discuss what the issues were as opposed to posting something under a false name for example. I have been seeing things like that entirely too much

recently. And it just seems like, **I guess PR professionals aren't really preparing CEOs.** I'm sure they prepare them for TV interviews but they don't really prepare them **for some of the silliness that goes on in the blogosphere. And, a lot of it is silliness but I think a lot of it is actual valuable news.** That's where a lot of people are getting their news now so its something to really consider.

N: Yea it's very easy to hit the send button before you think I think.

JB: Uh-huh.

N: Yea. Well listen, thanks for your time John. We appreciate it and I'm sure our clients will be very interested in what you've had to say.

Our guest has been John Biggs. He's an author, writer and blogger. You can learn more about John at his personal blog, BigWideLogic.com. So John, thanks so much for joining us.