

WHAT BLOGGERS WANT: PODCAST

Narrator: Hi everyone. **Today we're talking about press releases in the new media world with Tom Foremski**, founder and publisher of the [Silicon Valley Watcher](#), and former columnist for *Financial Times*. Tom also penned the influential article [Die! Press Releases! Die! Die! Die!](#) That has influenced the move to make press releases more transparent and web friendly.

Tom, thanks for taking the time to talk with us today. We're going to ask you just a few questions and appreciate any thoughts you can share about press releases. Our clients are always interested in how journalists and bloggers use press releases.

I would like to just talk briefly about your article. In it you say press releases are nearly useless. Can you explain that to our listeners a little bit more in detail?

Tom Foremski: Uh sure, well **the format they're produced in and the type of content, it's written by committee, always has all these hackney phrases about customers and so on and there really isn't much decent content in them.** I've sometimes wondered who they're actually written for. I assume they were written for the media so that we could get our jobs done but I'm sure that there's other reasons that that.

N: Right, well **some people are concerned that journalists and even bloggers may not take the time to write their own story about the release. Many, a lot of times, I have seen too just cut and paste the release after some minor edits.** And that means that they may not want to change the format of it since they're getting their message out there. **So how do you deal with a release?**

TF: Sometimes, it **depends on the content**, sometimes if its just the straight forward factual stuff it's perfectly okay... The factual paragraphs, after all it means that there would be less chance of making a mistake by rewriting the press release and in some instances that's all that's need in getting a piece of information out there.

N: Okay. **Some I've seen too have gone to using more bullets to kind of break up the release.**

TF: Yea, again it **depends on the nature of the content** if it lends itself to bullets and so on. But **fundamentally a press release should be in a format that helps me do my job so that things are clearly labeled, if it's bullets that's fine, it could be a page of relevant links so I can choose which ones I want to put into the piece myself. There should be some images for example so I can choose an image if I want to. There should be a section on factual information, when the company was founded and so on.** And it's okay just to take those pieces of information and cut and paste them because there's no spin on when the company was founded for example. **And in this day and age where newsrooms are really, really hard pressed, in terms of resources, to have a news release that is organized in a way that helps us do our job just seems to make so much sense.**

N: Okay and that brings me to my next question. **How do you prefer to receive press releases? Email only? Snail mail? Fax? Traditional wire releases?** How do you like it?

TF: **Well it has to be electronic. I mean fax? I don't think so. Snail mail? Definitely not. We live in an on-line world. We live in a digital world. I don't think there's room for anything other than an electronic press release.**

N: Okay. What is your opinion of using social media bookmarks on releases? Is that something you take advantage of?

TF: No, not really. **I don't know why anybody would want to be tagging and saving releases and so on, press releases, or digging them.** I think that's a waste of time. But I mean **you can stick them in there if you want. It's not going to do any harm.**

N: Do you think a comment section or blog component on an email (release) is useful? And how would you advise PR professionals to use that interactive comment blog component?

TF: **I don't know** if that's useful or not. Obviously, **most PR people don't want to write too many comments because they're afraid there could be negative comments. And so I rarely see that kind of thing** in news releases.

N: **Have you seen any kind of releases written the way you want them written or are they still pretty much just mainstream?**

TF: **People do add those components that I've talked about but still I haven't really seen anything that really matches what I described 3 years ago.**

N: **So again for our listeners, can you reiterate what you want to see in a release?**

TF: Yes, of course. **I'd like to see less spin in the release, more factual information. After all, as a journalist I'm going to put my spin on the story. And I'd like help in producing that story so I want the background information, fairly clearly labeled. Often I go to a news release to double check my information, check on the spellings of names and titles, things like that. I'd like some images so I can choose those. I'd like some relevant links to the company website, also maybe customers, also links to relevant stories about that company so I don't have to go out and find them myself last minute.**

N: **How about video?** Would you watch a video that was linked in the release?

TF: **Yes, sure.**

N: **And audio?**

TF: **Yea, anything. It should be a many media release.** Obviously there's no need to add video and audio sometimes depending on what the story is but if it does lend itself to that then why not? Give me, **give me a lot of resources I can pick and choose from.** I can either reject them all and find my own but at least I have something to go on with.

N: **Does it bother you if people you don't know send you releases?**

TF: No it doesn't. No, media professionals, we get this all the time. So, it's not a problem at all. It's the bloggers who aren't media professionals, they get bent out of shape because somebody sent them a press release and they don't know them. And over time I think they'll get used to it. But yea, we get hundreds and hundreds of emails a day. It's a pain trying to sort through them all but if I got upset about every release sent to me by people I didn't know I wouldn't be in this business.

N: Right. Is it valuable to you to connect with PR people on sites like Twitter or Facebook at all?

TF: Yea it is. I want to see that they're connected to me in some way and also that I can see them too. What Facebook for example does... I can see their picture, I can see how we're related through other people. You know, meeting so many people it's difficult to keep track of relationships and so on. So Facebook and Twitter and so on, at least I know that people are reading me, they're following various projects I'm working on or what I'm doing. And that usually results in a better relationship and better pitches. So it works both ways.

N: And, there is one final question. What are the main sources you use to find stories, other than releases?

TF: Well, I always like to look for original, original content. So, I go out and interview people. I go to conferences. I try to be out as much as I can. I don't spend that much time at my desk. Anytime I do is when I'm sitting down to write my post. So then I'm not really checking email and so on. It really is, I'm always looking for original content. And most people that can provide me with that content, provide me access to top executives and so forth, that's the kind of thing that I go for.

N: So you wouldn't mind if somebody reached out to you, a PR person, and said "hey, we can offer you a one-on-one interview with our CEO or, you know, somebody higher up in the company." That's something that you would welcome.

TF: Yes definitely, yea.

N: Okay, well thanks so much for your time today. If you had any other, one last piece of advice that you could share with everyone listening regarding how to find and communicate with successful writers like yourself, what would it be?

TF: Well, it would be, um, get to know them, and get to know the types of things they're writing about. And follow that thread. You know, some of the best pitches are, "I notice that you've been writing about this client, or, here's an interesting story related to that." Things like that are really good.

N: Excellent. Well Tom, thanks for your time. We appreciate it and I'm sure our clients will be very interested in what you had to say. Thanks so much.

TF: Thank you.