

2008 Journalist Survey

Two hundred and thirteen journalists participated in our recent survey. They came from all media types, with newspaper (46%) and magazine (34%) journalists most prevalent. We found many similarities with the responses we received last year. However, this year, in addition to questions about how they wanted to receive press releases and what they like included in them, we asked about how new media is changing the landscape of newsrooms across the country. Here is what they told us...

How they want it

Email is clearly the preferred method of receiving releases with a whopping 85% saying that email is how they “prefer” to receive releases. About 11% said they prefer regular mail but all other delivery options (fax, wire service, RSS feed, in person delivery) ranked under 2%.

What they want

We also asked journalists what they wanted in releases. The most important component was graphics with 82% of journalists responding that graphics were very important or important. Verbiage from releases also ranked high with 73% noting it was (very) important. And, 80% of journalists said that biographies, backgrounders and other related data was (very) important. Audio, video and logos, on the other hand, were deemed unimportant (although it must be noted that the survey is highly tilted towards print media and if you narrow responses to radio and TV then audio and video become much more important to our respondents).

Since many of our clients are interested in adding animation to their New Media Releases (a habit we try to avoid since it causes delivery problems), we asked journalists how they feel about animated emails. About 10% of journalists said they were “very likely” to open a New Media Release with animation and 31% said they were “likely.” However, 45% of journalists said they were “unlikely” to open an animated email and 14% said they would “never” open one.

How they use new media

We wanted to know how new media was changing the work habits of journalists so we asked what new media resources they used when researching stories. New Media Releases received via email were the most popular resource by far, with 80% of journalists saying they used NMRs in researching stories. Blogs also ranked high, with 51% of journalists reporting they were useful followed by social media sites which are used by 26% of journalists. Fewer journalists are using RSS feeds, only 20%, and videocasts and podcasts, 16%.

Additional comments

Finally, we asked a single open ended question: "Please tell us if you have any comments on how you receive press releases." Most respondents noted that they really like email as long as it doesn't include attachments. There is a strong preference for links to images and background info since those emails don't clog up the inbox. Many journalists told us that faxed or mailed releases are useless since they now need information in a digital format. Some journalists offered advice to PR professionals. In a nutshell, the advice was target your lists, keep it concise and newsworthy, don't call too much and timing matters. You can read the unedited responses below:

What journalists told us...

We asked journalists a single open ended question: Please tell us if you have any comments on how you receive press releases. About one quarter of the respondents answered. Here are the unedited responses:

Many responses related to HOW they wanted to receive releases:

Emailed releases are less time consuming—no need to retype information
faxed and mailed press releases never get looked at—100% email is ideal.

Email seems to be the best.

The best way to get my attention is email.

Via email! Hard copy is a waste of paper and often gets lost. It's much easier to keep track of electronic material.

I like the press release to appear in the e-mail, not as an attachment. I don't have time to be opening attachments for an initial scan, although I do like them when I'm interested in the story. I HATE animation.

Do not like releases faxed to me unless I request it verbally before hand.

Would somebody please kill FAX and put it out of its misery?

Email is best - nothing fancy. Sometimes our system kicks them out.

I prefer e-mail. I prefer not to be called. If I need more info, I'll call.

I stick with the old-fashioned way—emails and snail mail—mostly because I'm too busy to figure out if RSS Feeds and electronic press kits are really worth the time it would take to learn how to use them. I'm not saying that's the best way to do things, just how it gets done around here by those of us who are older than 30 or so. (PWR note: many journalists refer to "electronic press kits" as CDs that arrive in the mail with press information which appears to be what this journalist is referring to).

I prefer to have press releases emailed and sent both as an attachment and included in the body of the e-mail. If I can read the press release in the body of the e-mail, I can then determine whether or not I want to download the attachment.

Postal and fax releases are almost always discarded unread. Email releases have about two seconds to make their case or they're deleted. We get far too much mass PR from agencies that have taken no time to determine our needs or interests since our firewalls do not allow a lot of media, it's best that people email the story, with maybe a LINK to video or just overnight the video in dvd format that can play on computers. not all formats work. our firewalls are heavy.

Internet is the way I get information.

Hard copy and/or email OK

Many journalists told us WHAT they wanted to receive with their releases: The more thorough it is, the more likely I am to consider the press release for a story. And leave out the marketing jargon. Never say, "XYZ corporation is dedicated to excellence." Have you ever heard of a company that is dedicated to mediocrity? If something is excellent, new, better, fresh, hot, hip, cool, I'll know it when I read about the product or service. It will be undeniable if it actually is. I want to know what specific new or old need the product or service will fill or satisfy.

Prefer receiving by email with high res images (very important).

Email with immediate access to high resolution photos is best. Instead of having high resolution photos sent to me as jpgs, I prefer to have a link where I can go to to retrieve the photos. that way my e-mail is not clogged up with big pix.

I often receive the same release via e-mail, fax and snail mail. This is a waste of time, and resources. I would prefer always to receive email with hi-res images attached, which I can print and/or save as needed.

It's what's in the press release that matters to me. I resent receiving material that is not applicable to my column or blatant p.r. I want information relevant real stories tied to my topics

Please have the information in the body of the email, as well as an attachment. Also, if the release is just as an attachment, I might not open it—I don't know if it's a virus

If it's flashy, chatty, or otherwise short on substance, I trash it on sight.

Often press releases do not contain the most important information for journalists: that is: why, when who, how and when. If they could include that on the first paragraph it will be easier for us to read the press release. Otherwise is easier to click the "delete" key on the pc.

Prefer text in body of e-mail as everyone sends in different word processing formats.

Please, please, please don't send space-hogging graphics unless I ask for them. If I'm gone from the office for a day or two they can completely jam my mailbox, preventing all other mail from coming through. It really upsets me, and makes me dislike the sender. When emailing press releases be sure that the subject line says what the press release is about. Nothing is more useless than an e-mail to a journalist with a subject line "press release." I only get 200 of them daily. Put the important information in the text, not in an attachment. I have a database program that imports all e-mails that I want to save and makes them fully searchable -- but can't handle attachments. If you want me to be able to find you again, don't put anything important in attachments.

Like release in body of email message; attachment option okay too. Don't send any images unless requested. Links to images on-line are great.

Flash/animation are fine to see, but we can't download them for use. We rely on high resolution photos.

My main complaint is that I receive press releases with too much collateral info. I don't need to see clips of where the product has been mentioned. I don't need giant color photos of the product. And I don't need long bios of everyone who worked on the product. I need a quick explainer on what's new and a breakdown of ingredients and how it works. The release should ALWAYS say when it's launching, where it will be available and how much it costs.

Some journalists offered advice to PR professionals, most frequently regarding relevance, brevity, timely and excessive follow up calls:

I hate faxes ... and I hate having to wade through tons of PR BS to find out what they're pitching. Give me what, when, where and I'll call you if I'm interested.

like to see the information and headline in Subject field and top of page—contact info later.

Please make your press releases count ... 99.9 percent of the stuff I get is absolutely worthless, and if you don't take the time to figure out what my publication is about and you blanket me with useless crap, you're going to end up on my blocked list.

Though updates are always helpful, receiving constant updates on a single client invokes the law of diminishing returns.

Keep them concise and as neutral as possible.

I get a lot of junk that has no relevance to my magazine. I think people should refine their lists.

How I receive press releases is fine. The phone calls I receive to "make sure" the material has been received are unnecessary.

Please do not follow up to see if we've received the press release or if I'm interested. If I'm interested, of course I'll let you know.

Our use of press releases is governed by their local relevance.

I understand and appreciate getting the releases but the constant follow-up calls are extremely annoying. If a professional has created the release, they know to include their contact info—that should be sufficient for me if I have questions.

I find that frequently, even when I sign up for news releases from organizations I want info from, I get that info irregularly, or get dropped from the list, which is annoying. I also quite often get news releases from organizations which obviously know nothing about the publication they're sending it to—wasting my time with news inappropriate for the magazine.


Please send only those press releases that are relevant to my publication.

In a timely manner is a concern.

Please familiarize yourself with what we cover before sending any pitches—my mailbox is often filled with topics that aren't even close to the food industry—this would be very much appreciated.

Keep them short. THANKS.

Make it clear, easy and relevant. Maybe do some research into the kind of publication we are before you send us stuff that might just annoy us by wasting our time.





We are planning follow up calls to many of the journalists who responded. We will release a podcast of our conversations at a later date. If you have questions you would like us to pose please let us know.