

Do s and don'ts when dealing with journalists - James Lancaster, Business Editor, The Argus.

- 1. Read the newspaper before you send in a press release. Get a feel for the publication you are targeting. Is it weighty or quirky? Traditional or modern? Does it have any political or social slant? Nothing is more insulting to an editor than someone calling to see if a press release has been used when they have clearly never read the title.**
- 2. Make sure it's news. If your project went live three months ago, but your boss has only just signed off the press release, no-one is going to care about it.**
- 3. Check the paper's deadlines to make sure you send a release in good time. This doesn't mean on deadline in the hope it'll run further up the paper. Stories get placed according to merit. If you send in an average story hours before the publication goes to press, chances are it will get "spiked" - i.e binned. Give journalists plenty of time to work on your story, that way you improve your chances of getting better coverage.**
- 4. Few newspapers run press releases just as they stand; for most a press release is just the starting point for a news item. So always explain as much as you can about the story as clearly as possible. Also, make sure you have someone who can talk about the contents of the press release primed and available.**
- 5. Don't try and tease journalists into reading releases with a quirky intro. They won't read on. Just tell the story as directly and simply as you can. No silly puns.**
- 6. Avoid jargon and acronyms in a press release. You may know what they mean, but can you be sure the journalist receiving the release does?**
- 7. Don't call to see if a newspaper wants a press release sent - just send it. Don't phone to check whether they got it unless you've got a good reason to suspect they didn't.**
- 8. Exclusives - every magazine and every journalist wants them. It's up to you to decide whether small stories in many magazines is better than a big story in one. But remember, if you give the same exclusive to two magazines you will go on their black-list, no question.**
- 9. E-mail - most journalists like to receive press releases by email, but remember there's a huge variety of email packages in use. So always put a sensible title in the subject line and use attachments sparingly.**
- 10. The best way to get coverage is still personal contact with a journalist, but it's not a substitute for being relevant. However, if you can identify a couple of key people, arrange to meet them and explain what you're doing, they'll tell you if what you're doing is relevant or not, and they'll usually be willing to take the time to take your calls about news items in future.**
- 11. Make yourself available for quotes. Journalists will be much more inclined to listen to what you have to say if they know, on deadline, they can give you a call and get a quote from you without wading through PRs, some bloke in HQ in London.**