

Email and the Media: Tips for Success

Results of a recent survey of media preferences by Bennett & Company Marketing revealed that 58% of journalists (up from 47% in 2002) prefer to receive information via email; this is the first time that email surpassed wire services. Respondents also indicated that only one-third of the correspondence they receive is electronic. Seventy percent of journalists also said they read every email, except for obvious spam. According to one business journal editor, she reads every email, but she reads the ones with good subject lines first.

Email is great, and most of us use email to contact media and analysts, either sending news releases, pitches, requesting interviews, etc. But are we getting through?

Many journalists, after receiving thousands of emails, have written articles or posted their preferences – what they want and what they don't want, what works and what doesn't – so I thought it might be helpful to create a list of those tips. I realize that most of us already know and use many of these, so feel free to skip over ones you already use and scan the ones you may not have seen before.

Below is a list of tips to make your email news releases as effective as possible – and to get editors and analysts to open them.

Tips:

1. Starting from the top of the email, a big complaint of journalists is the long list of email addresses in the “to” field. The best advice here is to get a program or use a service that sends individual emails. Barring that, you can put your name in the “to” field (an empty “to” field scores high with spam filters) and put your list in the “bcc” field (this could trigger some spam filters, however). One reason given was that they simply don’t want to have to scroll down through the names to find the subject line or the news. [I’m not sure why else they object, but it’s easy enough to comply with this request, so why not?] One other thing: use the editor’s name if you can get it rather than sending to editor@ or news@. They’re more likely to respond to an email that’s directed to them personally.
2. A good subject line is a must – it’s your “hook.” Don’t be cute or clever, make sure it’s believable, and keep it close in wording/meaning to the release headline and keep it as short as possible so the editor’s email software doesn’t cut it off. Make the headline compelling, but be sure that it reflects the headline and content of the release. Some editors suggest putting [News], [Press Info], or [Story Idea], as appropriate, at the beginning of the subject line, but I don’t know if this works any better than a headline alone; might be worth a try. If you forward the email release (see #3), make sure there is no “FW:” in the subject line; many editors delete these without even opening.
3. Always copy your release into the body of the email in plain text and never send the release as an attachment. Not only are many viruses spread via attachments, many programs screen them out if the sender is unknown. Don’t forward your releases... most journalists find it a sign of laziness or disrespect when they see those >>> symbols running down the page. Of course, if you can set your email program to forward without the >>>s, that would solve the problem. [Remember to delete the “FW” in the subject line; see #2]
4. The format of the release is important, too. Use a standard font (Courier 10 pt, for example) and type only 60-70 characters per line. Some editors recommend hitting the return key at the end of every line to avoid runaway lines that can result with users of Pine and Unix mail, which don’t

always automatically wrap text. The shorter line also keeps your lines within view in most standard-size email windows as well.

Put “For Immediate Release” at the top of the email, then put the company name and Web site URL [format as “<http://www.companyname.com>”] on the next two lines. Contact info should follow the release. If the release is more than a page or a page and a half long, consider including only 4-5 paragraphs of pertinent information along with a link to the complete release. And don’t use all caps; remember – that’s the equivalent of shouting.

5. Use hyperlinks to additional information such as graphics, photos, white papers, bios, etc., but do not attach them to the email. If the editor is interested in the news, he or she can go the site to download the collateral. When you post photos, make sure they are print-quality and not Web-resolution quality.
6. If you set up your email to include a signature file, you won’t have to remember to add it. This not only gives the editor all the info needed to get in touch with you, it differentiates your email from spam, which usually has no signature info. Most editors requested the following info: name, company name, complete contact info [including email address]. Don’t attach a V-card instead of using a signature file.
7. Target your emails to editors who would be most interested in your news. Make sure your list is up-to-date so the news gets through. You should be updating your contact list at least once per quarter.
8. Give editors a way to get off your PR list and honor their request. If your releases don’t fall within their coverage area, they need to be able to stop them.

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