

3 Press Releases – dos and don'ts

Journalists and editors receive dozens of e mails every day, the vast majority of which disappear straight into the delete box because they are dull and uninteresting, of little or no relevance to the audience they are catering for, come from unknown or unrecognised organisations, are not eye-catching in any way or have no topical 'hook' to make the story worthy of publication. Catching the eye and interest of the journalist can be a tricky business, but if you have built a relationship with your local journalists, at least with those who are likely to be handling your story – you are at least half way there. If they know your name, recognise your e mail, have heard of your Club and know that you provide them with good quality material, your e mail will at least get opened!



If it's an invitation for a journalist to attend an event to cover it, make sure it looks like one. Put MEDIA INVITATION in the heading and make sure date time and place are clear at the top, if it is for a press conference make sure you state if it is an on or off camera conference, it will make a difference to who they decided to send and how they broadcast it. Also let them know who it is relevant too, don't invite camera crews and photographers if there is nothing to take pictures off and don't invite radio to something that can be seen but not heard. If you tuck away in the last paragraph: 'you are warmly invited to send a journalist...' don't be surprised if that fact gets missed.

Top Tips on Press Releases

- Most press releases are edited and shortened from the bottom up, so keep it short and get the important information in early.
- Put a date at the top and if you want the media to report this after an event has happened, put an embargo time alongside the date, that way you can send the release out in advance.
- Begin by outlining the facts, briefly and simply. Start by answering these questions in your first paragraph: who, what where, when, why and how?
- Include a quote, as journalists like to use these, but make sure it adds something to the story and is not just a repetition of the facts and clear the quote with the individual into whose mouth you are putting the words
- If you are mentioning another organisation in your release, it is a basic courtesy to let them have sight of the draft release and to agree the words and any quotes or other information given.
- Cut out or explain any jargon or acronyms.
- Leave 1.5 line spaces between each line.
- Try not to run over to more than two pages at most, but if you do, number each page

- At the top of each new page type 'continued' and type 'ends' at the very end so they know no pages are missing.
- Finish with the heading 'for more information contact' and give contact details of someone who a) is going to be at the end of that phone number during the day, b) knows about the subject and is briefed to speak to journalists. If it is an invitation for an event it is worth putting a mobile phone number in so that on the day 'lost' or 'late' journalists have someone to contact
- Put your Club website address in the 'for more information' section too
- Put 'notes to editors' (in single line type) at the end with more information about Soroptimist International, the Club, the campaign, any partner organisations and number and separate each point. Do check information you are giving out with the organisation concerned.
- When you have finished the release to your satisfaction go back and try and think of a snappy or interesting (and short) headline that will catch the journalist's eye.
- Many journalist will not – or are not allowed to open attachments, so paste the press release into the e mail message box, for the same reason do not send photos as attachments unless you have arranged this with the journalist in advance. Better to say photographs are available on request in the press release, and have them come back to ask you for them, specifying what they will take.
- Put the press release out on your Club website after you have sent it to your media distribution list, omitting the contact details and notes to editors.