



Top Ten Press Tips

1. Plan in advance.

Most publications, including national newspapers, plan their features content well ahead of it appearing on their pages. If you want to pitch an idea, then the earlier the better, especially if you're suggesting it to a freelancer who then has to approach the editor. Aim to be in touch with press at least eight weeks before you want features to appear, or even earlier if you can.

2. Know who you're talking to.

As a journalist, there's nothing worse than receiving a mass email that has been sent by someone who clearly doesn't know what you cover. Make sure that you are emailing the right people for your show and add the personal touch where possible.

3. Identify your targets.

This leads on from the above. If you want to catch the attention of journalists and editors, do your research. Work out what kind of work they are interested in and send personalised press releases or pitches to those who you think are most likely to cover your show. It seems like a small thing, but showing a journalist that you're aware of their work and tastes can make a huge difference (hey, we have egos too, and knowing that people are actually reading our articles can be flattering).

4. Keep it clear.

Like everyone else, journalists and editors tend to be busy people with overflowing inboxes. Press releases will often receive just a quick glance, so if the information is not laid out clearly it runs the risk of getting missed. Make it immediately obvious what the press release is about and keep the initial summary clear and concise.

5. Prioritise key information.

Again in the interests of clarity, make sure that your most important, attention grabbing points are right there at the top of the press release – or, even better, in the title. If you can pique a journalist's interest at the beginning, it's much more likely that they will read on.

6. Include all relevant details.

Despite what I said about being concise, you also want to make sure that all the details are there in case someone does want to find them. Summarise your key points at the top of the press release and then expand on these further down, making sure that the important information is clearly explained. This is where the 'notes to editors' section comes in handy.

7. Offer pointers.

If you can think of an interesting hook or angle that you think might appeal to editors, include this near the top of the press release. However, these should be framed as suggestions, offering room for journalists and editors to bring their own ideas to the table.

8. Get your email right.

It's vital to do everything you can to ensure that your press release isn't just deleted when it lands in people's inboxes. Make the subject line as clear and as snappy as possible, keep the message brief, personalise it where possible, and always include your press release in the body of your email as well as attaching it.

9. Chase – but be polite.

Journalists and editors get a lot of emails, some of which will inevitably slip through the net and end up languishing unread, so it's perfectly reasonable to draw their attention to your press release on a second occasion. It's easy to forget things even if they catch your interest, so I often appreciate receiving a polite reminder – emphasis on polite. Unless it's urgent, wait a good few days before following up with an email or a phone call, and know when to call it a day. No one appreciates being repeatedly pestered.

10. Don't be discouraged.

I'll say it again: journalists and editors get a lot of emails. Some days it can feel as though the press releases are flooding in and it's simply impossible to reply to everything. But this doesn't necessarily mean that the journalist or editor in question won't be interested in your future work, so continue to keep them updated on new projects. A 'no thanks' or an ignored press release is not necessarily an outright rejection; it could just mean 'not right now'.

These tips were compiled by Catherine Love, who is a freelance arts journalist and is currently working with house as an associate.