

Third Edition

# Strategic Writing

Multimedia Writing for Public Relations,  
Advertising and More

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## Feature News Releases

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### Purpose

The feature news release focuses on “softer,” less important and less immediate news than does the announcement news release. Feature news releases often are human-interest stories that highlight some aspect of your organization. Feature news releases are not as common as announcement news releases and traditionally attract less media attention. Always consider if your feature news release could work as an announcement news release. However, if your organization has an interesting story, but it’s not a good hard-news story, you should consider a feature news release or a pitch (see pages 65–69). (Please review the general guidelines for news releases, pages 43–50.)

### Format/Design

Follow the general guidelines for news releases, pages 44–47.

### Content and Organization

Feature news releases often present entertaining human-interest stories, such as the efforts of an officer of your organization to hire the homeless. Other feature news releases focus on topics bigger than your organization and use representatives of your organization as experts.

For example, Hallmark Cards writes feature news releases on the history and traditions of important holidays, such as Mother’s Day. In addressing these interesting topics, the news release uses Hallmark experts and research for evidence, thus bringing credibility to the company and linking it to holiday traditions. Some feature news releases include information from nonemployee, noncompetitive sources to round out the story.

Avoid the temptation to include unattributed opinions in feature news releases. Like all news releases, features must be objective and unbiased.

Feature news releases generally begin with a traditional news headline (see page 47). However, many feature news releases attempt to include clever word-play, such as a pun, in the headline.

Feature news releases don’t have traditional news leads. Instead, the lead attempts to spark the reader’s interest with a question, an anecdote, an image or a similar device.

Feature news releases use storytelling skills, so they’re not inverted pyramids, as are announcement news releases. The most dramatic paragraph in a feature news release might be the final paragraph.

Unlike announcement releases, feature news releases often use present tense to attribute quotations—for example, *says* instead of *said*. Present-tense attributions can help create the sense that a story, not just a report, is being told.

A more extensive discussion of feature stories can be found in *Newsletter and Magazine Stories*, pages 87–94.

## FEATURE NEWS RELEASE (E-MAIL)

To: JaneQReporter@newspaper.com

Subject: Palmquist Univ. duck race for United Way

### Palmquist News Release

For Immediate Release  
Sept. 7, 2012

#### Palmquist University to sponsor duck race for United Way

Palmquist University sophomore Andrea Smith has hatched a ducky idea for raising money.

"It started in my bathtub," she says. "But that's probably more than people want to know. Let's just say that I was playing with two rubber ducks and got a weird idea."

Smith's weird idea may help feather the nest of the Havelock County United Way. On Friday, Oct. 5, Palmquist University will sponsor its first rubber duck race on Patterson Creek. Five bucks buys two ducks, and the first duck to float to Old Bridge wins its owner \$100. The race begins at noon behind Sprague Hall. Anyone age 18 or older may enter.

"We were a little surprised when Andrea came to us with the idea," says Jane Evers, director of Havelock County United Way. "But she's put together a great program."

Ducks go on sale Monday, Oct. 1, in the Student Union.

"Palmquist University is delighted to help the United Way in this manner," says Edward Faxon, university president. "Especially if one of my ducks wins."

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For More Information:  
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## Hybrid News Releases

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### Purpose

Hybrid news releases usually are short. They have an attention-grabbing lead, after which they adopt the inverted pyramid style. They are called hybrids because they begin like a feature news release but quickly become an announcement news release. (Please review the general guidelines for news releases, pages 43–50.)

### Format/Design

Follow the general guidelines for news releases, pages 44–47.

### Content and Organization

The hybrid news release combines the announcement style and the feature style of news releases. It begins with a traditional news headline (page 47). The hybrid has a featurelike lead, designed to attract the reader's attention. Then the hybrid moves to an announcement style, delivering the facts in inverted pyramid form (page 48). Unlike the feature news release, information in a hybrid news release becomes progressively less important. Often, the first sentence after the feature lead begins a new paragraph and specifies *who*, *what*, *when* and sometimes *where*.

The hybrid news release can be ideal for a hard-news story that has a whimsical or human-interest angle—for example, a student group's sponsorship of a “weird pet tricks” competition for charity.

## HYBRID NEWS RELEASE (E-MAIL)

To:

Subject:

### Palmquist News Release

For Immediate Release  
Sept. 7, 2012

#### Palmquist University to sponsor duck race for United Way

Andrea Smith has hatched a ducky idea for raising money.

Palmquist University will host a rubber duck race Friday, Oct. 5. The event is a fundraiser for the Havelock County United Way.

"I got the idea for the race in August and have worked with the university and the United Way to make it happen," Smith, a Palmquist sophomore, said.

The race will begin at noon behind Sprague Hall. Ducks will be numbered, and the first duck to reach Old Bridge will win its owner \$100.

Ducks cost \$5 for two entries and can be purchased at the Student Union from Monday, Oct. 1, to Friday, Oct. 5. Anyone age 18 or older may enter.

"Palmquist University is delighted to help the United Way in this manner," said Edward Faxon, university president. "Our goal is to be an excellent citizen in our community."

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## Social Media News Releases

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### Purpose, Audience and Media

Like traditional news releases, social media news releases convey newsworthy information about your organization to the news media. But social media news releases differ from traditional news releases in many ways:

- Social media news releases exist only online, generally in a digital newsroom on your organization's website.
- Social media news releases are not inverted pyramid news stories. Instead, they resemble fact sheets, dividing a news story into snippets of information. Social media news releases list the details of a story; they are not ready for publication in their current format.
- Social media news releases generally are multimedia, often including links to still images, videos, sound clips, other documents and other websites.
- Social media news releases do not directly target journalists at traditional media (newspapers, magazines, radio, and television). Instead, they target bloggers and online journalists.

Bloggers are the primary target audience for social media news releases. Bloggers resemble online essayists more than they do traditional journalists. Thus, bloggers don't want ready-to-publish news stories: They want facts to mention, quotations to include and multimedia items, such as videos and online documents, to which they can link.

Many organizations prepare both traditional and social media news releases for news stories, placing both in their digital newsrooms. That approach allows online newspapers, for example, to use both kinds of news release: The traditional news release can provide the online story, and the social media news release can supply multimedia elements, such as photographs and links to videos, sound clips, additional documents and other websites. Below the text of their stories, e-mail news releases can include a link to a related social media news release.

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- **Key to Success:** Social media news releases deliver objective facts. Opinions appear only in the attributed quotations. Social media news releases generally supply links to multimedia materials that support the news facts.
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### Format/Design

A social media news release is a Web page, generally reached via a link in an organization's digital newsroom. Often, the date and time of posting appear below the headline link displayed in the digital newsroom.

The text of the release is single-spaced with extra spaces between paragraphs. Web pages often feature sans-serif typefaces, such as Lucida Grande. Bullets (•) generally introduce individual news facts, quotations and links to multimedia materials.

Social media news releases begin with large, boldface headlines; many releases include boldface subheadlines in smaller type. The date and time at which the news release was posted appear below the headline and subheadline.

Within the social media news release, bulleted facts, quotations and other items are introduced by internal headlines. Standard internal headlines include News Facts (or Key Facts or Core Facts), Quotations (or Quotes), Multimedia, Related Links, and For More Information (or Contact Information). Many social media news releases also include a brief description of the organization, often called a boilerplate paragraph (see page 50).

Unlike traditional news releases, social media news releases do not close with “###” or “-30-.” When readers can scroll down the page no farther, they understand that the release has concluded. Social media news releases generally conclude with a “For More Information” section.

## Content and Organization

Like all good news releases, social media news releases are newsworthy and objective; opinions appear only in attributed quotations.

Headlines should be newspaper-style headlines (page 47), just as in traditional announcement news releases. Because social media news releases lack lead paragraphs, they often include subheadlines that add key information to the headline. The headline often repeats the wording of the highlighted link in the digital newsroom.

Social media news releases continue to evolve, but they generally place internal headlines in a particular order: News Facts, Quotations, Multimedia, Related Links, About [Organization Name] and For More Information. The About [Organization Name] section often is a boilerplate paragraph (see page 50). Some social media news releases include an additional headline: Comments. Opinion varies about the wisdom of posting comments with a social media news release. Posting the comments can help the news release create an online conversation—but negative comments can undermine the document’s strategic message.

Concise, bulleted, newsworthy snippets of information appear in order of importance under each internal headline. The boilerplate passage often is an exception, appearing as a paragraph rather than a list of bulleted facts.

Bulleted items under News Facts and Quotations generally are complete sentences. Bulleted items under Multimedia and Related Links generally are highlighted links and can be sentence fragments, such as descriptive titles of the linked information.

Bulleted items under the Related Links internal headline often include a list of content tags and an offer of RSS (Really Simple Syndication) feeds:

- Content tags are created by authors to identify key bits of subject matter within their blogs or other forms of social media. Many social media news

releases use the term *Technorati tags*, a reference to Technorati.com, a website that can search the content of blogs and other forms of social media for specific tags.

- RSS feeds can automatically send news releases and other online information to individuals who request such a service.
- Related Links also can include a “Share This Page” bullet with logo-based links to social media such as Twitter and Facebook. Clicking on the Twitter logo, for example, would take readers to their Twitter accounts and would load the Web address of the news release into a tweet for them to send. Clicking on the Facebook logo would take readers to their Facebook account, allowing them to add a “What’s on Your Mind?” comment to the link before posting it.

### TIPS

1. As RSS feeds become more common, the challenge of publicizing and distributing social media news releases will decrease. Currently, however, social media news releases are viewed only by those who request or find them. You can help publicize your social media news releases by using search engine optimization techniques (making the releases easier to find through online searches) and by sending concise e-mails, containing a link to specific social media news releases, to individual bloggers and online journalists who you know would be interested in their content.
  2. Don’t e-mail social media news releases to traditional journalists unless they request that format. At the bottom of a traditional e-mail news release, you can include a link labeled “Social Media News Release” that will connect journalists to this alternate format.
  3. Companies such as PRWeb and PitchEngine can help you create social media news releases that include search engine optimization, increasing the online visibility of your release. Those companies also can help you distribute your release to appropriate bloggers and online journalists.
  4. Make a habit of reading social news releases to stay up-to-date with developments in this evolving form of media relations.
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