

MEMORANDUM

TO: West Valley Citizen Task Force
FROM: Melinda Holland, WV CTF Facilitator
SUBJECT: CTF Press Release Process & Media Relations Plan
DATE: February 27, 2007

The current CTF press release development process involves one or more volunteers drafting a press release (PR) as soon as possible after a CTF meeting. As facilitator, I circulate the draft PR to all CTF members and contact each member via email or telephone to determine if we have consensus on the press release or if additional work needs to be done on the draft to reach agreement. Several CTF members have stated that a faster process needs to be developed. Thus this topic has been placed on the CTF February 28th meeting agenda.

The CTF's Mission and Ground Rules state the following regarding media relations: IV.D. - *"Media Relations - The Task Force Members may develop a specific plan for interacting with media representatives. No CTF member will speak for the CTF to the media without the consensus of the CTF."* One possible interpretation of this ground rule is that the CTF may develop (and adopt it using the CTF consensus process) a plan for interacting with the media and for issuing press releases. Once a Media Relations plan has been adopted by the CTF, then following that plan would satisfy the requirements of the ground rules (In other words we would not have to obtain the agreement of all CTF members prior to issuing a press release).

On February 28th I will ask the CTF if they are in agreement with this interpretation or wish to suggest another. If the Task Force favors this interpretation, the CTF may then develop a Media Relations Plan which can include a streamlined PR development/approval process.

I have taken the liberty of compressing the PR process ideas suggested by several CTF members:

- Forming a "communication" or "media relations" committee (call it whatever we want) that would be responsible for handling press releases and communicating with the media. They may be able to quickly respond and issue information and possibly without the full CTF consensus;
- Have a group of people pre-approved and trusted to write PR's without having to go through the cumbersome group editing process;
- A rotation of members (monthly) working on a draft which would then be circulated for edits and if there were no edits the draft would be submitted for a press release. This rotation would cover all members and each member would already know beforehand and plan accordingly. Since all members are on this rotation this would cover the consensus issue that slows this process down. Since there are 12 or 14 members and consensus is needed, have 7 or 8 on the press release and let all 7 or 8 go through the writing, editing and approval process. Once a final draft is sent out then Melinda can circulate to all as an FYI."
- A small committee to draft PRs and then get approval from the [entire?] group.
- Possible PR topics are discussed early in a meeting, someone drafts it during the break or second half of the meeting, and it is edited/ approved at the end of the meeting.
- Perhaps at the break of a meeting we could start thinking about what we want in a PR that meeting, and someone or more could draft it during the second half, to be approved at the end of the meeting.

- Do rather simple releases, mentioning only the topics heard at that particular meeting (certainly not controversial or secret since they're on the agenda) then including a bit about the site each time... taken from official documents (e.g. the WVDP is located... is the result of...)... in other words facts we all know, but the public might not realize... That way, we could all be in agreement ahead of time, and merely need to inform the members when/if/to whom it goes out, not wait for approval.

For those of you who are interested in learning more about writing/issuing press releases two web sites listed below might be of interest.

<http://www.prfree.com/index.php?cur=index&action=member&mode=hintS>

The above web site contains the following suggestions:

PRESS RELEASE HINTS

"The How-To List To Ensure Your Release Attracts Media Attention"

1. Address your audience - the media - appropriately.
2. Use a powerful opening.
3. Identify your angle - and make it different.
4. Communicate your story.
5. Eliminate excess.
6. Use industry lingo sparingly.
7. Act and be direct.
8. Use facts.
9. Get it in writing.
10. Describe your company and its activities.
11. Remove formatting.
12. Use the Write Balance(TM).

Address your audience - the media - appropriately.

If you write your release directed to consumers, you miss valuable opportunities for media outlets - frequently those online - which pick up press releases to run in their publications with little or no modification. Press releases written as sales pieces will be ignored - in their entirety - and set you up for developing a reputation of sending sales pieces, not real news. Often journalists use press releases as the basis for feature story that incorporate what you have written. In the body of the release, understand that the points you make - and the order in which you make them - may direct the journalist in how to develop that story.

Use a powerful opening.

Convey your message quickly and concisely - use your headline and first paragraph effectively.

If journalists were to read only that portion of your release, there should be enough information to understand what the release is about. The body of the release identifies supporting information.

Identify your angle - and make it different.

Understanding why journalists would find your story interesting is the key in getting recognition. While we would all like coverage, uncovering what specifically makes your business or service

truly unusual or makes you different from your competition is crucial. If you have trouble doing that, seek out the opinion of current or new customers, or ask us for advice. Can you link your press release to current events or social issues?

Communicate your story.

You might be tempted to include references to customers who have used your product or service successfully. Including testimonials may be effective in persuading potential customers to buy from you, but they do not encourage members of the media to write about your company. Describe how your company uncovered a need in the community and how your solution met it. Clearly note benefits of using your product or service - without overstating them.

Eliminate excess.

Work on establishing credibility with the media. Don't stray from clarity or try to sell. Make your release speak to journalists by using effective combinations of words - you'll be far more effective at capturing attention - the right kind - without the use of exclamation points.

Use industry lingo sparingly.

What would be appropriate if you were sending your release to professionals in your industry will not be the same for appealing to a general audience.

Act and be direct.

Convey your news directly. Evoke the sense of movement by using words that echo the feeling of a conversation you would speak out loud. Use the words you need to - no more, no less. Keep it simple.

Use facts.

Journalists are trained to question and verify. They will read between your statements and pick them apart. Overblown claims do immediate damage and ensure your release is ignored. While you are working to convince them what you claim is truthful, you must attempt to establish credibility early in your release - then communicate your excitement about your product or service. One of the best places to share your enthusiasm is in a quote, rather than in the body of the release.

Get it in writing.

Protect your company - get authorization to use references from employees or affiliates of other companies or organizations in writing. Do additional homework and verify information provided to you with another person. A word about ticker symbols from public companies you reference in your release - use caution. These companies have an established reputation; if you trade on it by using the goodwill associated with their names, you are exposing your company to ramifications if these companies perceive your association as detrimental.

Describe your company and its activities.

Tell the media what your company is all about with a concluding summary that describes your company, products, service and a short company history. Remember press releases issued by

more than one company should include descriptions of both.

Remove formatting.

Since press releases are distributed in a wide variety of ways, including over some antiquated wire service networks, special formatting conversion inserts strange characters making your press release more difficult to read. Remove any HTML, XML or other special formatting to ensure your release looks good. If you're in doubt, use a plain text editor, like Notepad, to review your release.

Use the Write Balance(TM).

Press releases that contain only a sentence or two may tell the story if it is announcing a management change, for example. It is more likely, however, that an explanation of the new person's background is appropriate. Use what you need to convey your message - again, no more, no less.

The following web site contains more extensive interactive tutorials on how to write press releases:

http://www.willitfly.com/wif/module.jsp?testId=248&orgId=47&dId=24&catId=Cat_3&subNm=Public%20Relations&catNm=Marketing