

SEO PRESS RELEASE WRITING TIPS & DISTRIBUTION SERVICE

Transform your online press releases into SEO
press releases Public Relations White Paper

Presented by NASDAQ OMX GlobeNewswire

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INTRODUCTION

The birth of the press release dates back to the beginning of the 20th century when Ivy Lee issued a statement on behalf of the Pennsylvania Railroad. Of course, Search Engine Optimization (SEO) didn't exist to "to supply the press and public of the United States prompt and accurate information." We do believe, however, that important lessons can be learned from the true pioneers of public relations.

On October 28, 1906, 50 people lost their lives when a three-car train of the Pennsylvania Railroad's newly equipped electric service jumped a trestle at Atlantic City, NJ, and plunged into the Thoroughfare creek.

The following day, Lee, who some consider to be the father of modern public relations (PR), developed the first press release, and gained his first client in The Pennsylvania Railroad. Lee not only convinced the company to distribute a public statement, he also convinced them to provide a special train to get reporters to the scene of the accident.

The New York Times was so impressed with this innovative approach to corporate communications that it printed the first press release – verbatim – on October 30, 1906, titled "Statement from the Road." In the weeks that followed, other newspapers and public officials effusively praised Pennsylvania Railroad for its transparency and honesty.

The following Spring, a group of anthracite coal operators sought out Lee's expertise during a labor strike. Lee's second press release was criticized by journalists who felt the piece was actually an ad disguised as a story to manipulate news coverage.

In response, Lee issued what is well known in the PR world as a "Declaration of Principles," stating, "This is not a secret press bureau. All our work is done in the open. We aim to supply news. If you think any of our matter ought properly to go to your business office, do not use it."

Lee's declaration stressed the importance of transparency.

"Our matter is accurate. Further details on any subject treated will be supplied promptly, and any editor will be assisted most cheerfully in verifying directly any statement of fact. In brief, our plan is, frankly and openly, on behalf of business concerns and public institutions, to supply to the press and public of the United States prompt and accurate information concerning subjects which it is of value and interest to the public to know about."

With more than 100 years of technological advancements, our news reaches the audience faster, but the importance of the press release has remained the same.

Search engines and news distribution networks such as Yahoo! News, Google News, Bing News or Ask. com News are now the standard channels by which the press and public distribute and find relevant news stories.

This has prompted a new generation of pioneers to re-invent the press release for news search engine and the emergence of the SEO press release, also known as press release SEO, SEO press releases, press release optimization, the optimized press release, or optimized press releases.

Just as Lee had faced criticism from journalists in the early twentieth century, a new class of PR professionals experienced the same reaction when the SEO press release debuted on the market in 2003. This new way of optimizing the modern press release has yet to be fully adopted, but may have the potential of becoming our version of Lee's Declaration of Principles. Three specific groups will determine the fate of the SEO press release, possessing distinct and potentially conflicting goals.

The first group is the marketing decision makers. The early adopters of the SEO press release need to focus on the success metrics that Chief Marketing Officers (CMOs) and Vice Presidents (VPs) of Marketing are focused on. This group of senior executives typically plan and direct all aspects of an organization's marketing policies, objectives and initiatives, and would most likely express the most interest in implementing an SEO and PR strategy.

Although some top marketing executives want to know how much media coverage or "buzz" an online press release generates, their primary objective is to find out the amount of traffic and leads the news will generate. In other words, a press release distributed through online channels needs to meet the goals of CMOs and VPs of Marketing who are more interested in "outcomes" than "outputs."

The second and third groups are the press and the public. If the mainstream media, including reporters, bloggers, consumers or customers, discover an SEO press release in news search engine results, they will likely express hostility if it looks like an ad disguised as a story to manipulate news coverage.

You'll need to do more than sprinkle keywords within your online press releases to transform them into SEO press releases that can meet the potentially conflicting goals of marketers, as well as the press and public.

SECTION 1: SEO PRESS RELEASES

The online press release is undergoing a paradigm shift that changes more than the way PR campaigns are executed; it challenges the basic assumptions about public relations itself. This white paper explores the shift and offers best practices for transitioning to the new paradigm.

The shift began when Google News, a computer-generated news site that aggregates headlines from news sources worldwide, included press releases in its news search results in September 2002. Yahoo! News, Ask. com News, and Bing News, the three other major news search engines, followed suit in the years to come.

Traditionally, a reader will prefer a specific news outlet over another for all breaking news and headlines. The search engine works a little differently and identifies several articles and releases regarding a given topic. The reader now has the chance to make a decision on what the subject matter and which. which accounts of each story they'd like to read.

SECTION 1: SEO PRESS RELEASES (CONT.)

Search engines select and rank content on the frequency of a given topic. Articles and press releases in news search engines are selected and ranked by computers that evaluate how often and on what sites a story appears online. News search engines also rank those articles based upon certain characteristics of content such as originality, location, relevance, and diversity.

When the press and public use any of the major news search engines, they will often find the headlines of recent and relevant press releases in the results. When these users click on a press release headline that interests them in Google News, Bing News, or Ask.com News, they go directly to press release distribution service. However, when they click on a press release headline in Yahoo! News, they go to a copy of the press release that is hosted on either Yahoo! News or Yahoo! Finance. This makes it very difficult to include Yahoo! News activity in most press release access and traffic reports.

On Feb. 23, 2011, Google began rolling out a series of major algorithm changes that became known as the "Panda" update. The initial update was followed by Panda 2.0 on April 11, 2011, Panda 2.1 on May 9, 2011, Panda 2.2 on June 21, 2011, Panda 2.3 on July 23, 2011, Panda 2.4 on August 12, 2011, Panda 2.5 on September 28, 2011 and Panda 3.1 on November 18, 2011. It is also worth knowing that the "Panda" updates were just some of roughly 500 search improvements that Google rolled out to search in 2011.

The "Panda" changes significantly affected many distribution services and most online press releases by tackling the difficult task of algorithmically assessing website, content, page and article quality. Since this dramatically impacts SEO press release writing and distribution, it's worth taking a step back and explaining some of the ideas and research that drove the development of Google's algorithms.

On May 6, 2011, Google Fellow Amit Singhal posted some questions on the Google Webmaster Central Blog that one could use to assess the quality of a website, content, a page, or an article. He said, "These are the kinds of questions we ask ourselves as we write algorithms that attempt to assess site quality. Think of it as our take at encoding what we think our users want."

He added, "Of course, we aren't disclosing the actual ranking signals used in our algorithms because we don't want folks to game our search results; but if you want to step into Google's mindset, the questions below provide some guidance on how we've been looking at the issue."

WEBSITE

- Would you recognize this site as an authoritative source when mentioned by name?
- Content
- How much quality control is done on content?
- Page
- Is this the sort of page you'd want to bookmark, share with a friend, or recommend?

ARTICLE (OR PRESS RELEASE)

- Would you trust the information presented in this article?
- Does this article have spelling, stylistic, or factual errors?
- Does the article provide original content or information, original reporting, original research, or original analysis?
- Does the article describe both sides of a story?

- Was the article edited well, or does it appear sloppy or hastily produced?
- Does this article provide a complete or comprehensive description of the topic?
- Does this article contain insightful analysis or interesting information that is beyond obvious?
- Would you expect to see this article in a printed magazine, encyclopedia or book?
- Are the articles short, unsubstantial, or otherwise lacking in helpful specifics?

Singhal said, "We encourage you to keep questions like the ones above in mind as you focus on developing high-quality content rather than trying to optimize for any particular Google algorithm."

Now, it may seem odd that Google is setting standards for how to write a press release. Or, as SEO-PR's president, Greg Jarboe, has asked, "How many Google engineers does it take to change a style guide?"

- A. The number one followed by one hundred zeros.
- B. Three. One to hold the ladder, and two to organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful.
- C. None. It's a PR problem.

But, SEO press releases need to follow Google's "Quality Guidelines" to enjoy better ranking.

SECTION 2: SEO KEYWORD RESEARCH TOOLS

One of Google's content guidelines suggests: "Think about the words users would type to find your pages, and make sure that your site actually includes those words within it." So, we suggest that you think about the words news search engine users would type to find your business or financial news, and make sure that your SEO press release actually includes those words within it.

The first step is to get into the mind of the press and public. How do you discover the words, terms and phrases that news search engine users might use? This process begins by:

- Brainstorming keyword categories that address what your customers want as well as what journalists need.
- Compiling the brainstormed keywords for further review of traffic potential, competition, and other factors.

The next step is using one or more of these free SEO keyword research tools:

Google News Autocomplete: In August 2009, Google enabled Suggest in Google News. The feature provides real-time suggestions as you type into the search box on Google News. In October 2010, Suggest was renamed Autocomplete as part of the launch of Google Instant.

As you type, Autocomplete returns search queries based on other users' search activities. These searches are algorithmically determined based upon a number of purely objective factors (including popularity of search terms) without human intervention. All of the queries shown in Autocomplete have been typed previously by other Google News users. The Autocomplete dataset is updated frequently to offer fresh and rising search queries.

SECTION 2: SEO KEYWORD RESEARCH TOOLS (CONT.)

Yahoo! News Search Assist: Yahoo! first introduced this feature on Yahoo! News in November 2009 and an enhanced version rolled out in July 2010 that provided near real-time suggestions in Yahoo! News Search. Although similar to Google News Autocomplete, Yahoo! News Search Assist will often make different suggestions. The best strategy is to use both tools and select any relevant terms that both suggest.

Google Trends: This tool lets you compare the world's interest in different topics. Enter up to five topics and see how often they've been searched on Google over time. Use commas to compare multiple search terms. Located beneath the Search Volume Index graph is Google's News reference volume graph. This graph shows you the number of times your topic appeared in Google News stories. When Google Trends detects a spike in the volume of news stories for a particular search term, it labels the graph and displays the headline of an automatically selected Google News story written near the time of that spike.

Google Insights for Search: This tool lets you compare search volume patterns across specific regions, categories, time frames and Google properties. For example, Insights can be used to determine seasonality. A ski resort may want to find out when people search for ski-related terms most often. According to this tool, the results are fairly consistent throughout the years: interest picks up in August and peaks in December and January.

Keyword research involves more than looking up search frequencies; you may want to consider other relevant factors, including: conversion potential, marketing strategy, legal issues, competition level, traffic potential, and website content.

In addition, the average search term is currently three words long, so don't be afraid to use longer phrases -- particularly if they include shorter terms within them. For example, "travel deals" is a popular two-word search term, but "last minute travel deals" is a popular four-word phrase. And the two-word term is included within the four-word phrase, so using the longer phrase in your SEO press release means it can be found for both.

It would be challenging to optimize a press release for 100 search terms, but you can optimize it for at least two or three longer phrases. You'll want to identify the most relevant search terms for the Five Ws (and one H).

- Who is involved: Groupon travel deals
- What is the story: Best travel deals, best vacation deals, or great vacation deals
- Where does it take place: Las Vegas travel deals, Hawaii travel deals, Egypt travel deals, Florida vacation deals, Vegas vacation deals, Hawaii vacation deals, or Caribbean vacation deals
- When does it take place: Summer travel deals, last minute travel deals, or Memorial Day vacation deals
- Why is the story interesting: All inclusive last minute vacation deals
- How is the story useful: How to save money, how to save money with coupons, how to save money on food, or how to save money on gas

A common objection we hear is that journalists and bloggers are turned off by reading an SEO press release. The answer resides in the fact that SEO press releases use terms and phrases that people -- including journalists and bloggers -- are likely to use when conducting a news search.

Using a two-word term like travel deals or a four-word phrase like last minute travel deals in your press release doesn't look unusual. In fact, it can often make your press release easier to understand, particularly if the alternative is using some neologism or newly coined slogan that is rarely searched upon.

SECTION 3: SEO PRESS RELEASE WRITING TIPS

Google strongly encourages you to "Make pages primarily for users, not for search engines." We strongly encourage you to write SEO press releases primarily for news search engine users, not for news search engines.

For example, Business Financial Publishing distributed two SEO press releases in early 2008. The first was about the one year anniversary of its small cap investor website, SmallCapInvestor.com. The second was about a new stock research report entitled, "China Investment Report: Top 5 Chinese Stocks for 2008." The first release garnered 1,594 page views and generated one registration. The second release garnered 1,414 page views and generated 44 registrations. The first release was written slightly better for news search engines, but the second release was written 44 times better for news search engine users.

In order for the SEO press release to get an optimal ranking to be discovered by news search engine users, Southwest Airlines and SEO-PR made sure that it actually included search terms -- especially in key positions.

The news search engine algorithms scan the title, headline, and at least the first 100 words of online news articles and online press releases. And they give extra weight to words that appear in subheadings, bold, italics, or anchor text links.

The best way to ensure that your SEO press release appears for particular keyword searches is to include the most relevant and popular search terms, and also include phrases about your company or product in your headline, subhead, lead paragraph, and anchor text links.

According to Google News, you should be sure that your headline is not too long nor too short. Currently, a headline is required to include at least 10 characters and be between 2 and 22 words long. Although the typical headline is about 7-10 words long (42-60 characters), a longer headline that's about 14-20 words long (84-120 characters) can be more effective for an SEO press release. Why? A longer headline can include more search terms.

A study of more than 500 optimized press releases conducted by SEO-PR found that the headlines which were above average in getting people to read a full version of a press release were an average of 14 words long.

THE TOP FIVE HEADLINES WERE AN AVERAGE OF 16 WORDS LONG:

- "Jay Leno Opens Up to CarTV, AutoBytel's Car News Channel, About His Newest Love Interest - A 2005 Ford GT"
- "Halloween Pumpkin Carving Stencils and Thanksgiving Pumpkin Pie Recipes Featured in Better Homes and Gardens Magazine"
- "Search Engine Marketing Organization (SEMPO) Announces Three New Members of Advisory Board"
- "Click Fraud, an Industry Crisis, or Blip on the Search Engine Marketing Landscape?"
- "BHG.com Holds Straw Poll for Halloween Pumpkin Carving Stencils of Barack Obama, Joe Biden, John McCain and Sarah Palin"

SECTION 3: SEO PRESS RELEASE WRITING TIPS (CONT.)

Although the goal of an SEO press release is to rank high in news search results, don't miss the mark by writing copy that's overly repetitive or unreadable. Using keywords too frequently is considered "keyword stuffing," which results in a negative user experience and can harm your press release's ranking.

Try to strike a balance. If you use two or three SEO keywords in your headline, then use closely related search terms in the subhead and long tail keywords in your anchor text links. Write press releases primarily for humans, with search engine considerations a secondary concern.

Also, avoid using puns and double entendres in headlines. Humans have trouble with headlines that are too clever by half and, as Steve Lohr of The New York Times noted in an article entitled, "This Boring Heading Is Written for Google" (April 9, 2006), "There are no algorithms for wit, irony, humor or stylish writing."

In addition to including the most relevant and popular search terms and phrases about your company or product in your headline, subhead and lead paragraph, you should also add links in your SEO press release that are intended to help people find interesting, related content, when applicable.

There are two reasons to add links to press releases.

The first is to drive traffic to your website. Driving traffic is one of the primary objectives of website SEO, according to the SEMPO State of Search Report 2010, published by Econsultancy. It can be one of the important objectives of an SEO press release, too.

The second reason that adding links to your release is beneficial is that the more useful the content you link to, the greater the chances that journalists and bloggers will find that content valuable to their readers and also link to it. The sites that link to you can provide context about the subject matter of your site, and can indicate its quality and popularity. The best way to get other sites to create relevant links to yours is to create content that can quickly gain popularity in the Internet community.

Using links in a press releases is important but with limits. Too many links can quickly mark an SEO press release as spam. A good rule of thumb is one link per 100 words.

SECTION 4: SEO PRESS RELEASE DISTRIBUTION SERVICE

Google News currently finds articles by crawling more than 25,000 news sources, including dozens that distribute press releases. Yahoo! News enables users to search over 7,000 news sources, including half a dozen press release distribution services.

But, neither of these news search engines crawls billions of websites to find press releases nor are they able to manually add press releases that are sent to them.

Google News says, "Google News currently finds articles by crawling online news sites. We're unable to manually add press releases that are sent to us via email."

Yahoo! News says, "Unfortunately, we cannot take individual press releases and add them to our service. If you submit your press release to a well-established news agency, it may well appear on Yahoo! News."

The best way to get news sites and blogs to create relevant links to your site is to announce original and unique news of genuine value and include links in your press release to help people find interesting, related content on your site. Creating

newsworthy SEO press releases pays off: Links are usually editorial votes given by choice, and online journalists and top bloggers can be excellent sources of high value links. And the more useful the related content on your site is, the greater the chances that online journalists and top bloggers will find that content valuable to their readers and link to it.

SECTION 5: PRESS RELEASE SEO REPORT

The last step represents both a challenge and an opportunity for PR professionals. The use of PR metrics and Web analytics to measure the results of an SEO press release campaign.

The closer you can get to measuring the value of an SEO press release in driving website traffic, generating leads, and selling products, the better.

To do that, you also need to learn how to use Web analytics to get rich insights into your website traffic and public relations effectiveness. Google Analytics and other Web analytics software allow you to analyze your website engagement in an entirely new way. This includes how much referral traffic came from online news articles and blog posts as well as SEO press releases.

This may be "terra incognita" for many PR professionals. However, several organizations are already using these tools to measure the results of their marketing programs.

CONCLUSION

The continued adoption of the SEO press release is not guaranteed. However, it is following a well-traveled path towards becoming standard practice.

As Mr. Lohr noted in his article, "This Boring Heading Is Written for Google," in The New York Times,

"In journalism, as in other fields, the tradition of today was once an innovation. The so-called inverted pyramid structure of a news article – placing the most important information at the top – was shaped in part by a new technology of the 19th century, the telegraph, the Internet of its day."

He added, "Putting words on telegraph wires was costly, so reporters made sure the most significant points were made at the start. Yet it wasn't all technological determinism by any means. The inverted pyramid style of journalism ... became standard practice only in 1900, four decades or more after telegraph networks came into use. It awaited the rise of journalists as 'an avowedly independent, self-conscious, professionalizing group,' confident of their judgments about what information was most important."

He concluded, "The new technology shaped practice, but people determined how the technology was used — and it took a while. Something similar is the likely path of the Internet."