

Avoid the email abyss

 By [Michelle Joubert](#)

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How to write effective media releases...

A key requirement of the JSE's listing rules is to ensure full and equal public disclosure of information on a real time basis. Listed companies are obliged to publish announcements on material developments or price sensitive information via the Stock Exchange News Service (SENS), a division of the JSE's Issuer Services Division.

A SENS announcement is often accompanied by a media release. Media releases are an effective tool to build the credibility of a company's brand; maximise reputation by generating coverage across media platforms; and influence perceptions among key stakeholders.

For journalists, media releases are often used as the base to develop an article or feature around a particular company announcement.

In the today's digital age, however, the chances of journalists writing a story based on a media release alone is not guaranteed.

Journos are still valuable

While new media has given audiences greater access to information, the role of the journalist is not obsolete. On the one hand, social media platforms, such as Twitter, provide information. Journalists, on the other hand, provide analysis and remain crucial to influencing perceptions among key stakeholders. The media affords companies an opportunity to get their messages across to the right audience. Therefore, journalists continue to be valuable in helping companies maximise their publicity and generate media coverage.

The ability to write a good media release is an essential skill and is critical for communicators tasked with promoting and protecting a company's reputation.

In the context of the digital news age, how do companies ensure that they write effective media releases that journalists will cover? Four approaches might ensure that the media releases complied by a company do not end up in the email abyss:

1. Before issuing a media release, the first step involves asking if the media release will provide the public with any new information. In other words, question if there is any news value contained in the media release and the point of the release. Critically ask yourself if the material in the media release is newsworthy. If the answer is yes, chances are the journalist is

likely to use the release to inform a wider article or feature on the subject.

2. Next, adopt the inverted pyramid rule to writing your release. The inverted pyramid focuses on including answers to six key questions (who, when, what, where, why and how) right at the beginning of a media release.

The inverted pyramid is important as it mirrors the journalistic way of covering news, by including the most important information upfront. The remainder of the release should then contain information in descending order of importance. This approach is vital when drafting a media release, as it ensures that the attention of journalists is captivated upon engaging with your email. If the strongest part of your communication is not made clear upfront, journalists will simply not take your release further. Very often, editors also edit releases from the bottom up, so this structure also ensures that vital information is not left out.

3. Ensure that you include a quotation from a senior representative of a company as early on in the release as possible (so it has less chance of being edited out) The quotation is the one section of the release that could be reproduced verbatim in print and online media. While the majority of the release will contain factual information, the inclusion of a quotation from a CEO, CFO or COO of a listed company will provide a voice to the announcement. The quote reiterates corporate messaging and illustrates how the announcement pertains to the company's strategy, people or a particular industry.

4. Lastly, when writing a release brevity is critical. In a world where your target audience and journalists can receive information in less than 140 characters, it is important to keep media releases short, clear and concise. Given the overload of information in the digital age, journalists are swamped with media releases from a range of other companies. Journalists simply do not have the capacity to handle the volume of news flooding their inbox. For these reasons, companies are in constant competition and are vying for media attention. A short and punchy media release could improve the chances of greater exposure in the media. A release of 800 words is ideal and any additional information can always be included in the boiler plate or "notes to editors section".

The approaches are not exhaustive, but help to guide companies to ensure that they are able to get their corporate messages across to the right audience effectively.

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Michelle Joubert is Head of Investor Relations and Group Communications at the JSE. With 15 years of experience in the areas of media, Investor Relations and Reputation Management, Michelle's role at the JSE also incorporates heading a team offering related services to companies listed on the exchange.
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