



INTERNATIONAL BLUEGRASS MUSIC ASSOCIATION

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By Vernell Hackett

A press release is one of the major links between an artist and the media. One would think that the person who writes and sends a press release would want it to be as clear and precise as possible so the receiving party knows immediately what the release is about.

Unfortunately that's not necessarily the case. Whether from lack of knowledge about writing a release or just lack of knowledge about writing, the media is often forced to dig through a release to try to figure out what the person who sent it is trying to convey.

Take, for instance, a release sent out this past year on a major artist. The release went on and on for paragraphs about the artist and his band and one particular musician who would be joining the band. Never did the release say when the musician would start playing on the road with the artist or if they would be on all dates or select dates only. I know many members of the press who just threw the press release in the garbage can.

With email, snail mail and faxes, most members of the media receive 20 or 30 press releases a day. When looking at that release for the first time, we immediately want to know the basics: Who, What, Where, When, Why and How. We don't want to have to dig through the release to find this information. We don't really want to have to call and ask the publicist for information that should have been in the release. If we want to do a story we may call to ask more questions, but the basic information should be there.

Freelance journalist Jon Weisberger agrees that the most important information should be at the top of the page followed with further relevant, but secondary information. Then the release could finish with general background on the artist, followed by contact information for the publicist and web links for more information. He also cautions this should all be in the space of one page.

Sharon McGraw, from *Bluegrass Unlimited* wants the most important information in the first three lines of text. Make sure you include all necessary information, i.e. name of band, venue, etc., address for contact, web, e-mail, title, street date. Most people are not going to search to find this information; they'll throw it in the trash.

Jon says he prefers concise press releases that don't try to do the job of a bio. He points out that a press release and bio serve different functions.

McGraw adds, "I also think for bands, it's important to brand yourself. Don't wait for someone to classify your music. Tell them up front what you do. Getting rid of an unwanted tag is pretty hard to do. My favorite is "slam grass," and they weren't kidding either?kind of like AC/DC met

Monroe.?

Among the pet peeves listed by journalists are the releases that go on for page after page, releases that have no real news value but were apparently sent just to tell the client that a release was sent out and publicists who send out releases to everyone on their list?regardless of whether the receiving journalist writes about that kind of music or not.

McGraw says her biggest pet peeve about releases is what she calls ?overshare.? She explains, ?Too much information and then leaving out the necessary parts. Most folks don't care who influenced your writing of the song, or that you grew up in Kentucky and you'd like to thank God for your talent (which can be up for debate). Keep it simple and informative. Absolutely never leave off your contact information, and proofread!?

Bob Cherry of *Cybergrass* has several pet peeves, among them a release with not enough information, bad grammar and a fancy format. He says if there is a story that justifies a press release, it should be three or four paragraphs long. He also points out that bad grammar will not endear a publicist to him. ?I see ?there? for ?they?re? or ?their? a lot. These words do not mean the same thing and are not interchangeable. I also see a lot of spelling errors in releases that I receive, which means I need to proofread and correct errors before I can use the information.?

Another item Bob mentions, and one that is on the list of other media folks as well, is the format of a release. So many publicists try to make their releases look fancy with two or three headlines and subheads, then bold text in the body of the story and even different colors and/or styles of type. This really doesn't impress anyone and if we are cutting and pasting something, we have to take the extra time to change all of it back into one style. Oh yeah, and the multiple headlines? Repeat that information in the body of the release, please. The headline(s) are not the first paragraph of your release.

Another pet peeve from Cherry is getting a press release that goes on and on about two or three different things an artist is doing. In today?s age of technology, it?s not that hard to do one release about the new album, one release about the charity event and another about the new tour.

One of the major pet peeves mentioned is publicists that send press releases in PDF format. This is a major hassle for media. First of all you have to save it, and then open it again. Then you have to print it because we can?t highlight, cut and paste as you can a Word document. Then it has to be retyped into our computers. If I'm on a deadline, am I going to use a release that has to go through all these stages or one that I can cut and paste? Hmmmm?.let me think on that one for a second.

A close second to how not to send a release is via a link that takes you to a page on the Internet, though this one was not frowned upon as much as the PDF. Along the same lines, it never hurts to ask how someone wants to receive press releases. There might be folks that prefer to receive it via snail mail or fax.

Similarly, you should know if the media person likes follow-up phone calls or emails, or wants you to leave them alone once they have the release. For me, the quickest way to get me to not use that release is to call me about it the minute it hits my desk and every day thereafter for the next two weeks.

As far as images being sent with a release, please make sure to identify everyone in the photo. Also be sure that the photo can be extracted from the release if it is not attached as a jpeg file. It is also helpful to know the size of photo needed by the person you are sending to. Some folks might want 300 dpi, while others could use 72 dpi.

While no one reading this story has probably ever made any mistakes in their releases, there are some good stories circulating about interesting press releases received. Bob recalls getting a press release on a new album coming out that failed to mention the artist anywhere. He says, "It wasn't in the title or the body of the release. At least they had the title of the album! Had I not known about the album coming out already, I would have never known who the artist was."

He also recalls a recent photo he received. "It had a photo and a cutline. That's all. The title told what it was about but absolutely zero to print with the photo. I wonder what the agency that sent it out was trying to achieve?"

Sharon has a similar story. She says "My favorite has to be the CD release with the band name spelled wrong in the release several times."

Think you couldn't possibly be the publicist any of us are talking about? Maybe you're not, but believe me, we didn't make any of these up. It just takes a few minutes to read through the information you send out to make sure it says exactly what you want it to say. As Sergeant Friday always said in Dragnet ". Just the facts, ma'am. Just the facts."

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