

The Press Kit — Putting Your Best Foot Forward

There are as many opinions about press kits as there are PR people putting them together and journalists receiving them. Don't take anything written here or said today as the hard and fast truth — always ask the journalist you are dealing with.

The Arsenal



- A fact sheet about your business
- Biographical information about the owner(s)
- Contact information (could be a business card)
- A press release (or releases)
- An updated, (easy-to-navigate) website
- Good, high quality images (digital format if possible)
- A newsletter
- A press kit
- A contact database
- A tip sheet (i.e. story ideas)
- Statistical information (especially trends)
- Relevant news clips about you or your business
- Post cards and thank-you notes
- Internet access
- You! (You are the greatest PR asset your business has)

Good Resources (There are lots more, but these offer good starts)

Books:

Public Relations Kit For Dummies— Eric Yaverbaum

Marketing For Dummies— Alexander Hiam

Guerilla PR— Michael Levine

Guerilla Marketing— Jay Conrad Levinson

The Anatomy of Buzz— Emanuel Rosen

Websites:

<http://www.online-pr.com/>

Important Stuff To Keep In Mind About Press Kits



- 1) **The press kit should be one of the tools in your PR arsenal, not the entire arsenal.**
- 2) **Press releases and pitch letters are the best first tools to make contact with the media.** Press kits should be the follow up tool when more information is requested or as a take away at a media event or trade show. Think of the press release as the 'blind date' and the press kit as 'meeting the parents.' When a journalist asks for a press kit they are probably serious about doing a story on your business.
- 3) **Random distribution of press kits is a waste of your time** (and the journalist's time as well) and more importantly, your money.
- 4) **Assembling a press kit is easy.** Developing the contents of the press kit is less easy. Good writing and good photography are important. If these are not your strengths, hire professionals — it is worth the money!
- 5) **Backup your press kit with online content.** Keep press releases and tip sheets straight forward and to the point. Use your website as the resource for more detailed information.
- 6) **Less is more.** Most journalists work in comparatively small offices and don't have space to store a lot of things — not to mention that they receive hundreds of pitches and press releases every day. In planning your press kit, assume everything but the smallest piece of information will be retained. Make every element count!
- 7) **Add value to your kit by expanding the focus beyond you.** This may seem counterintuitive, but your story will carry more value if it ties into to a region or a national trend, or something broader than just your business.
- 8) **The press kit is a living, breathing thing.** Ask opinions from friends, PR people and journalists. Do they like it? Is it helpful? Would they use it?
- 9) **Don't make journalists work.** Make sure information is brief, to the point and easy to find. If they ask for things to be e-mailed, forget about the printed press kit!
- 10) **You are the most important part of your press kit.** Be friendly, be helpful, be the resource. Go the extra mile and most importantly, be yourself!

Building Your Press Kit



A press kit should be reflective of your business and your personal style. While being true to your business and your personal style, it must still be professional. Don't use hard-to-read fonts, write clearly and concisely, and use art to enhance your presentation, not detract from it. Following is a simple guide on how to put a press kit together.

- 1) **Choose something to hold all your information.** There are wide variety of folders available through office supply stores or you may want to utilize your website or a CD-ROM.
- 2) **Include brief biographies about you, your business partners and key staff.** Don't make it a resume, just the highlights of why you are interesting and what you bring to the business.
- 3) **Compile recent press releases, clips, sell sheets, tip sheets and your newsletter if you have one.** Don't include redundant information. If you have one piece that says it best, great!
- 4) **Include some good photography.** Snapshots are fine for a website and to give people a feel for your business, but they will never be used in an article. If you are a talented shutterbug, great. If not, hire a professional — it will be worth it. You don't need a million shots of your place just several really good ones. Digital photos are often preferred, so make sure they are taken on the highest possible resolution and that they are well framed, the color is good, etc.
- 5) **Include a list of resources for additional information.** Again, don't make the journalist work. If you are claiming to be part of a growing trend or are basing your release on some statistic, give them a link to where they can find it and other information about the topic.
- 6) **Don't include 'chatchkes'.** This was a big trend for a while and it was believed that it 'got you in the door.' If your press kit is garbage, a refrigerator magnet with your logo on it won't save you. Additionally, everyone in the world tries it and it typically ends up in the trash or on a table in the break room for other staff to take. Much better to follow up with some small token on the back end which comes across as a genuine 'thank you' as opposed to a gimmick on the front end.
- 7) **Cheap tip:** One of the easiest, cheapest and most consistently effective ways to get someone to open your correspondence? Use a stamp and (neatly) handwrite the address.

And In Conclusion ...

Is a (printed) press kit really worth it?

More and more journalists, editors and freelancers are listing their preference to be contacted by e-mail over other methods. If you are not communicating with the press electronically, you should be moving quickly in that direction. With that being said, mail is still considered a more than acceptable (but potentially less effective) way of reaching the media.

In the strictest sense, a printed press kit is direct mail, the same as any catalog or credit card offer you receive. Think about how you process this type of material when it comes into your own home. You might browse through it initially and even put it on a shelf for a while, but you don't hold onto it. Once the need has been served, you discard it. Apply this reasoning to developing your press kit. We live in the 'on-demand' world and need to play by its rules.

- 1) Lead with the press release (this is the 'shotgun' — you're not sure who your audience is) or the pitch letter (this is the 'rifle' — you have targeted specific outlets or writers).
- 2) Keep the writing brief and to the point — focus on catching their attention.
- 3) Give them a place to go for more information (such as a website or your telephone number).
- 4) Before sending a printed press kit, let them know the same information is available on your website (and make sure that it is!) — odds are that most will opt for visiting your website. Offer to e-mail them the link, this will allow you to capture their e-mail address.
- 5) Don't do up a huge supply of press kits in advance. Have a few available, ready to go as needed. This will force you to keep the kit up to date.
- 6) Be responsive to the needs of your customer (in this case, the journalist). If they don't want a printed press kit don't send them one. Also, if they don't want to be e-mailed, don't do it. How do you find this out? Call the outlet you are trying to reach or visit their website. In many cases, all of the contact information you need will be listed there.

In short, there is still a place, and likely there will continue to be a place for the printed press kit. Like it or not, however, the future is electronic communications.