



Top 10 Online PR Mistakes

By Susan Hallam, Managing Director of [Hallam Communications Ltd \(www.hallam.biz\)](http://www.hallam.biz)

Online Press Releases are a great way to drive visitors to your website, to get visibility in the search engines, and to get inbound links to your website. It can mean a lot of benefit for relatively little effort.

But it can be a case of “*easy to do, easy to do badly.*”

Here are my top 10 Online PR Mistakes for you to avoid:

1. Lack of Success Criteria Measures

Why are you sending out a press release? What’s going to happen that is going to make this campaign a success? Ultimately, you probably want more sales, or leads, or a spike in visitors to your site. Online press releases contribute to this success in a number of different ways:

- Improving your website rankings in news and search engines
- Increasing in the number of links to your website
- Rise in site traffic (visitors)
- Click throughs on your press release
- “Crowding out” your competitors in the search engine results
- Blog mentions
- Social networking links

You need specific, measurable and realistic success criteria from the start, otherwise it will be tears before bedtime.

2. Not Doing Your Keyword Research

Your press release may be distributed directly to journalists via a newswire service, but the real key to success is ensuring the press release can be discovered in the search engine results. That means crafting your press release so that it contains the very phrases searchers are looking for.

So, you have to do your homework. Use free tools like [Yahoo! Searchmarketing’s Keyword Assistant](#) to find out the volume of searches on your key phrases.

Are people searching for your brand name or company name? Maybe not...

Are people searching for what your product does, or the problems they’re facing, or the benefits your product brings?

It’s easy: find out what they’re searching for, and then write about it.

3. Not Playing the Keyword Game

Once you've identified your press release's strategic key phrase, you need to methodically place that phrase in a number of places in your press release:

- Headline of the press release
- Executive summary
- Headings
- Subheadings
- In the first hundred words or so

Take the opportunity to replace any pronoun like "it" or "it's" with your key phrase or other thematically related words.

It may jar your precious copywriting nerves, but this repetition is crucial to the success of your campaign.

4. Not linking back to your website

It's the web, and that means it's all about link. It's not rocket science: just include links from your press release back to your website.

But not just any old link. The link has to:

- Go directly to the relevant content appropriate to the press release
- If appropriate, to a page you've created on your website specifically designed for the press release campaign (a "landing page.")
- The link must contain the key phrase that you're optimising for. This is called "anchor text" and it is a crucial part of search engine optimisation. We are optimising for [search engine optimisation training](#), so use that phrase in your link. Don't say Click here, don't use your company name: use your keyphrase.

5. Using the wrong press release service

Online press release services push your content into the major news search engines, such as [Google News](#). You want to choose a service with direct feeds to the media, as well as having an email distribution list to journalists who have opted-in to the service.

There are a number of free press release services out there, but as my grandmother always said, you get what you pay for. If the free service is pumping out press release sewage, do you want to be associated with that?

And don't be tempted to push out the same press release using multiple services. Once Google has discovered your press release, then your task is accomplished. Submitting to multiple services, as a general rule, is unnecessary.

Here are some press release services to consider:

www.prweb.com

www.preneswire.com

www.preleap.com

www.przoom.com

www.pressbox.co.uk

www.24-7pressrelease.com

6. Too Many Messages

Many press releases are written with witty, clever or ironic messages. Unfortunately, search engines like Google are literal text crunchers, and Google will not understand your hidden meaning contained within the double entendre.

Or the press release lacks a single focus, often containing several different announcements. Which means the search engines can't be entirely sure what you're writing about.

I'm not recommending you stuff your press releases with key phrases. Or that you write boring press releases.

Write creative and compelling press release, but don't lose site of your key phrases.

7. Not reusing your press release content

You've done the hard work and written the press release; now make it do double duty.

Once you've written your press release, sit down and quickly write several variations of its content. Write a new version optimising for a different key phrase. Write another version for a different audience segment. Short version, long version, technical version, local version, foreign version. Use these different versions as part of your Online PR search engine optimisation campaign.

Take one variation and put it on your blog. Don't be tempted to duplicate content, it has to be unique but you're going to keep reinforcing the key PR messages.

Publish your press release on your website in your Media Centre. And don't delete old press releases, leave them there in an archive which is aging gracefully in the Google index.

8. Not Measuring Your Results

Online PR is a numbers game. You can measure visits and clicks and downloads and links.

And you have to measure you're the results to see if your campaign was a success, and to learn lessons.

Your online press release distribution service will give you metrics – use them!

Your own web hosting statistics will also let you measure the effectiveness of your campaign, particularly if you're using a specific landing page associated with the press release.

Use free services like [Google Alerts](#) to monitor and measure the success of you campaign. Or consider subscribing to other web clipping services like [CyberAlert](#) or [PRNewswire's eWatch](#) service.

9. Sending your press release as an email attachment

Don't. Send. Attachments. Ever.

It drives journalists nuts. Word documents and PDFs clog up the email mailbox. Attachments get caught in spam filters. It causes formatting nightmares.

Do it the simple way: just include the body of your press release right in the email body.

And better yet, include a link in the email to the copy of the press release hosted on your website.

10. It's just not newsworthy

You will only get the benefit of Online PR when your content is valuable, or new, or interesting. If it's just regurgitated company marketing spin, then nobody will link to it, nobody will read it, nobody will report it.

PR is PR is PR – and whilst technology changes the rules of the game, ultimately you need to write a great press release fit for human consumption.

PS – one more mistake for you to avoid:

11. Abusing Social Media Sites

There are marketers and PR practitioners out there endorsing the submission of press releases to social networking sites in the same way you can submit press releases to news search engines. Don't do it!

Don't be tempted to send press releases to [digg](#) or [del.icio.us](#). You'll burn your base, and end up looking like the bad guy.

Instead, publish your news in your own blog, and encourage bloggers to comment on it.

Cultivate relationships with influential bloggers, and give them scoops they can blog about. Participate in social networking communities, but don't use them as a channel for press releases.

Susan is Managing Director of [Hallam Communications Ltd, a UK Internet Marketing agency](#). She has more than 20 years experience working in the online information industry, and has been providing consultancy and training to businesses using the Internet since 1993.

She specialises in providing support to companies seeking to expand their businesses internationally, and is committed to raising awareness of the opportunities and issues surrounding international trade.

Born in Philadelphia but a resident of Nottingham since 1985, Susan now delivers training and consultancy across Europe and North America. Her consultancy combines her expertise as a former Senior Lecturer in Computing at Nottingham Trent University with her experience of senior Internet marketing roles at BT and Capital One.