



# NAHB Building Business Briefs

A Service of the Business Management & Information Technology Committee

## Maximize Your Marketing With Press Releases

Want to increase your company's visibility? Try using press releases. Contractors like these free marketing tools because they get results.

"In the home building market, people need to see your company's name six times before it clicks," says Erika Geiser, vice president of marketing for Christopher Homes in Las Vegas. Press releases subtly help them make that connection. "We get some calls from prospects [after a press release runs], but the main impact is, 'oh, we've heard of you,' or 'we saw you in some magazine or newspaper,'" says remodeler Greg Miedema, president of Dakota Builders, in Tucson, Ariz.

### Got News?

Press releases are newsworthy statements about a company and/or its products or services. They're designed for publication in newspapers or magazines and are pitched to media editors or reporters, although the information ultimately is intended for consumers. Press releases sometimes appear on company Web sites, too.

"I want someone to read what I'm saying, be excited about it, and then take action," says Chris Stebnitz, marketing and advertising manager for Stebnitz Builders in Delavan, Wisc. "If one of these things doesn't happen, the rest won't. When all three things happen, people are more likely to tell their friends about what they've read. If they read it and are excited about it but don't take action, the impact dies down."

"When we feel we can justify some attention, we send them out," says Miedema. Here are some significant items and events contractors publicize with press releases:

- Educational certification
- Appointment to boards and committees
- Awards
- New models, communities, divisions, brands, product lines, partnerships, and services
- Special programs
- Participation in home parades and tours, charity projects, and other events.

### Got Style?

You can't write any old thing and call it a press release. Follow an established journalistic format for your press release, or editors may not read it. Here's how to do it right:

*Format:*

- Keep the length to two pages or less. If you use a second page, include a header that repeats the headline and includes the words "page 2."
- Print the press release on company letterhead.
- Put contact info at the top: someone's name, phone number, and e-mail address. (Decide ahead of time who will handle inquiries about your company's news.)
- Use a short, attention-getting headline. It should relate why the item, service, or event is noteworthy. For example, "Joe Smith Receives Any Town's First CAPS Certification," or "XYZ Builders' Parade Home Draws 1,000 Visitors."
- Double-space the body text.
- Start the first paragraph with a dateline: The city and state where the event or news takes place. Add the date, including the year, and then a dash (two hyphens run together are fine).

*What to Write:*

- First paragraph—Introduce your news in one or two short sentences that describe what it is, where and when it will take place, who will benefit from it, and why it's pertinent.

If it's a product or service intended for your customers, mention how it will save them time or money, make their lives easier, enhance their safety, or give them more quality for their money, since those are the folks you're marketing to. "The more interested they are, the further they'll read," says Stebnitz.

- Second paragraph—Explain the news in more detail, but don't overdo it. Less is better when it comes to press releases. Include a quote in the second paragraph to give your news human interest. "A quote can add a perspective a reporter or editor hadn't thought of before," says Paul Lopez, NAHB's director of media relations.
- Third paragraph—Summarize the news and add a sentence or two that inspires readers to act on it. Invite them to come see your parade home, visit your company's Web site, drop by your office, call about an estimate, or see your new showroom. Be sure to repeat the contact information from the top of the press release.

Include a carrot for media editors, too—let them know you've got photos to send them, more information and company background material if they need it, a company Web site, etc. "While in some instances people might want to run your release as is, you want them to call your president and learn more about the event and your company," says Kym Kilbourne, director of public relations for NAHB.

*Sign Off*

- Center three pound signs (###) a few lines below the last line of text. That's press release shorthand for "the end." You don't need to spell out those words.

## **Press Release Pointers**

Here are some additional tips from industry pros:

**Introduce yourself to the media.** Contact newspapers and magazines to find out which editors receive press releases, what topics they cover, and how they prefer to receive your information. Most want electronic press releases, but some may want them snail-mailed. "Know your audience," Kilbourne advises.

In addition, ask about the publication's lead time and ask for a copy of its editorial calendar, if it has one.

**Update your media list regularly.** People come and go at publications, and press releases may not reach a new editor if they're sent to the person's predecessor. About once a year, call your contacts to make sure they're still working their particular beat and to ask about themes for upcoming issues.

**Respect lead times.** It takes time to get something into print, even in a daily newspaper. If your local paper is planning a special supplement on home repair, send them a press release about your new handyman division at least three or four months before the publication date.

**Work your connections.** "The best success for placement comes from editors we know," says David Bryan, president of Blackdog Builders in Salem, N.H. It sometimes helps to send press releases to the publication's salespeople (especially if you know them and have placed an ad with them), and ask them to pass them along to the editor.

**Keep online newsrooms current.** If you post press releases on your Web site, do it regularly. Reporters may not return to your Web site if they see press releases that are several months old. "As soon as you send out a press release, post it in your newsroom," says Kilbourne.

**Don't think of press releases as ads.** Yes, you're using them to market your company, but do it subtly. Don't get too pushy or promotional. Stay away from ad lingo like "for a limited time," "act now," etc. Publications know it turns off readers, and won't be likely to run press releases full of hype.

"Make the message like that of a public service announcement," Bryan suggests. "Something like, 'Here's something that's good to know,' but it's not necessarily all about your company."

**Don't act like a telemarketer.** Send press releases only when you have something truly newsworthy and spectacular to relate, and don't call to follow up on them. If the publication needs more information to run your release or write an article from it, an editor will contact you.

**Don't come up short.** A press release's message must be consistent with the company's focus and direction. "If I tell someone that we'll exceed their expectations and it doesn't come true, then I've oversold and under-delivered," says Stebnitz.

**Don't get too fancy.** Use a common, easy-to-read font like Arial, Times, or Times Roman. Reading more than a few lines of flowery script or a loud, circus-style typeface is hard on the eyes. Plus, it steals thunder from what you're trying to say.

**Don't embed digital photos** in an electronic press release. They can bog down the document's download speed, and the recipient may cancel the transmission. Instead, be sure to point out in the third paragraph that you have digital photos available to send and/or mention where they're stored on your Web site. "A press release is a basic tool," says Kilbourne. "Your event is the snazzy part."

*Want more tools to maximize your marketing? Pick up a copy of The Best of Sales and Marketing Ideas. Compiled from the most popular articles in Sales & Marketing Ideas magazine, the book offers tips, techniques, and advice from successful home builders and prominent new-home marketing pros. It costs \$33.75 for NAHB members and \$37.50 for non-members. Call 800-223-2665 or visit [www.builderbooks.com](http://www.builderbooks.com) to order it online.*

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