

If they can find it, they will come: Optimizing your online pressroom

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In today's busy world, having an easily accessible and organized online pressroom can make the difference as to whether your company is included in a reporter's story or not. The blurred definition of "journalist" means that, in addition to reporters from traditional media outlets, bloggers and even consumers are accessing your online pressroom for information. Saving people a phone call gives them — and you — precious time. What are the criteria for today's online pressrooms? What considerations should be taken in building or updating a Web site?

The pressroom in a social media world

As Web sites have evolved over the years, so have online pressrooms. Improvements have included easier navigation, increased ease of use and added content. In the last couple of years, as social media use has skyrocketed, Web 2.0 tools have crept in as well.

The most common Web 2.0 tool to be added to online pressrooms is RSS (Really Simple Syndication) feed, providing journalists with a fast and easy way to read regularly updated Web content such as press releases.

Photography and video also have become increasingly popular. For Lauren Coleman-Lochner, retail reporter for Bloomberg News Service, having company advertisements in online pressrooms has been very helpful. "I don't watch that much TV, so I don't necessarily see the ads," she says.

To benefit from your online pressroom, journalists need to be able to find it first. Terms that reporters use in search engines are as unique as snowflakes. You need to accommodate them all to make your online pressroom accessible and to escalate its online visibility. Some journalists use the term "media" or "press" and the company name; while others type in the company name and "headquarters" — still others use the name of the company with the name of the CEO or media contact.

What reporters need

Simply posting press releases is enough these days for an online pressroom. Remember, most journalists do not rely on the company Web site as their main source of company news.

"We get most press releases sent to us," says Roger Buoen, managing editor for MinnPost, an online news site based in Minneapolis. "I have never used them [online pressrooms] for a press release, but

rather for media contact information."

Indeed, having the names, numbers and e-mail addresses of your company's media contacts easily available is probably the most crucial aspect of an online pressroom. After all, reporters often need to conduct interviews to complete their stories.

So, what should be included in an online pressroom? Here is a sample list:

- Press releases, including PDF versions that can be downloaded and printed
- Media contact information
- Company history
- Management roster along with respective bios
- Q-and-A
- Photography (various formats and sizes)
- Company statistics
- Graphs and charts
- Company timeline
- Links to financial filings
- Videos
- Logos

Of course, you could include much more depending on your company and the nature of its business.

Naturally, reporters have come across their share of bad online pressrooms. Buoen says that the bad ones make it difficult to find the press releases, media contacts, company management list and corporate address. "Where the company is located is important to stories," Buoen says, "and you would be surprised how many companies do not put their corporate address out there." Other top reporter complaints include pressrooms that are not easily accessible from the company home page or are difficult to navigate.

An extra set of arms and legs

At its best, an online pressroom can serve as an extra media relations team member who gives reporters the information that they want when they want it.

"I really like it when I can get what I need from an online pressroom and not have to call," says Nicole Garrison-Sprenger, reporter for the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*. Garrison-Sprenger estimates that



photographer's choice

she visits online pressrooms a couple of times a week, and about half the time the pressroom provides her with what she needs without having to contact the company.

For Coleman-Lochner, online pressrooms serve as verification. In the world of Wall Street, Coleman-Lochner does not rely just on wire services to ensure that company earnings releases are legitimate. "If a company comes out with a big announcement, we won't attribute it to the company until we can confirm directly with the company by their posting on their Web site," she says.

In some instances, your company's online pressroom can be the deciding factor on whether your company is included in the story.

Buoen, who used to work at the Minneapolis *Star Tribune*, relates one example: "At the paper, we used to put together graphics about companies, such as revenue and where it is located. The easier it is to find information, the more likely a graphic will occur. If it requires a lot of phone calls, we just won't do a graphic."

If managed correctly, an online pressroom can save time for you and for the journalists who cover your organization as well as provide a boost to your company's visibility. It's important to work with your company's IT and marketing departments to ensure that your organization's pressroom isn't an afterthought. **T**

How to make your online pressroom meet today's changing media needs

1. **Keep it simple.** Reporters are often on deadline and need information right away. Make it easy for them to find what they need.
2. **Make media contact information prominent.** Often reporters just want to pick up the phone and call someone. They become frustrated when phone numbers are not readily available.
3. **Ensure easy access from your company's home page.** While many departments of a company compete for precious home page real estate, if reporters cannot find your media information then your organization may not make it into the story.
4. **Provide RSS feeds.** Rather than checking frequently to see if your company has released information, RSS feeds can give reporters your company's news as it happens.
5. **Keep your online pressroom organized.** Clutter and chaos have no place in an online pressroom.
6. **Use the terms "media" and "press" in your online pressroom.** A reporter's typical Google search to find media materials is either "media" and the company name or "press" and the company name. If you use both, reporters have a better chance of finding you.
7. **Offer a search box.** While your online pressroom should be intuitive and easy to navigate, offering a box in which reporters can search for specific terms can help them find information.
8. **Provide more than just press releases.** Online pressrooms that provide executive bios, company statistics, research, downloadable content and more give reporters story ideas as well as the information that they need. **T**



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