# A virtual *Press Room* makes a real difference

By Nora Firestone

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Good news!

You should share it.

One of the best ways to help a journalist tell your story — or initially discover you — is to create and maintain a good *pressroom*- or *newsroom*-style section for your website. As a reporter I’ve discovered excellent new contributors for articles by way of these virtual bullhorns, and they’ve also helped to clarify information for me as I penned stories about existing sources. As a business owner I’ve been on the flip side of the discovery, securing newspaper, magazine and radio interviews for clients and as other members of the media have invited me to contribute to articles, radio interviews, a book, TV news segment and more.

Essentially, a pressroom (or you may call it *News Room*, *News and Events* or something similar) is a showcase of your company’s news and press releases, as well as a depot for the kind of accurate and reliable official information that members of the media will need if featuring you in an article or broadcast segment. By virtue of the regular addition of fresh, timely content, a pressroom and its related pages also help to further overall search-engine optimization, or SEO, efforts, which include appealing to potential customers.

## Effective pressrooms incorporate several elements that work together synergistically.

First, design your pressroom to be visible within your website’s menu. It’s essential that journalists be able to access it quickly and easily. For SEO purposes I recommend the multiple-word form of the name you use in the menu — as in Press Room, News Room or News and Events.

On the main pressroom page, display a running list of all press releases, from newest to oldest. For each entry in the list include the release title or headline, release date and a brief and “keyword-conscious” summary of the related news. Using the titles as anchor text, link each item in the list to a unique page where the full, individual release is posted directly to the page. You may also include a printable/downloadable document copy.

While individual press release styles, purposes and content may vary, each one should include the following basic elements:

* Be one to two pages (about 400 to 800 words) in length
* Be timely and relevant to the intended audience (in other words, to the journalist’s readers, viewers or listeners)
* Be properly formatted, including release date and city and state of origin or relevance; media contact information; the full official name of the company upon first reference; an articulate, concise and relevant heading; a “nut graph”-style first paragraph that summarizes the importance or relevance of the information to follow
* Concise and well-written paragraphs that convey the “who, what, when, where, why and how” of the news or event
* Properly formatted quotes from company representatives and/or beneficiaries, with names and titles
* A helpful attitude, which includes the addition or offering of relevant, high-quality images for use with the story or pitch if needed; the offering of additional sources who can help fill out the story; and the assurance that the appropriate company representative(s) will be very accessible for questions, more information and clarification as needed
* Proper grammar, punctuation, spelling, capitalization and professional style

Optimize all press room-related pages by using relevant and keyword-conscious headings and subheadings (H1 – H6), URL paths, and descriptive metadata such as page title tags, page descriptions and alternate (“alt”) text for images and video. Even printable/downloadable file versions of your releases should be optimized with such metadata and saved to your computer with brief, relevant and keyword-conscious file names because much of this information may accompany uploads to the Web.

\*(Tip: Providing a press release or other article as both on-page content and a downloadable/printable file may present what’s called a *duplicate-content* issue for your SEO efforts. To avoid that issue, it’s best to either tag the Web page as “canonical” or offer the option to print the Web page with a sharing tool such as AddThis rather than upload the duplicate file. You may discuss this with your webmaster.)

Include a *Media Contacts* page to display essential information such as the full, official company name, a company boilerplate (summary of who you are and what you do), access to high-quality images and/or other supportive digital media, and the name and contact information for the designated company representative or hired marketing professional handling media relations. This person should be very accessible to journalists; typically two phone numbers (an office number and an after-hours or mobile number) and an email address are expected. This contact page may also include an email contact form, but not as a substitute for immediate-contact information.

Never capitalize for emphasis in any content other than graphic design. Improper capitalization — for instance, setting a company name in all capital letters if it’s not an acronym or capitalizing areas of service or expertise, as in Financial Planning and Car Insurance, in the body of text simply because you deem the words important — is incorrect and amateurish, therefore **noticeably unprofessional**. Capitalization has meaning of its own and is reserved for very specific use, including sentences beginnings, proper nouns, certain titles that precede names, and certain instances of initialization, such as acronyms.

**Never confuse journalism for marketing with your media outreach**. The job of *real* journalists is to report accurate and newsworthy stories to their audiences; real journalists are ***not*** your co-marketers. For marketing efforts, call the advertising department.

An overall respectful and professional pressroom presence and media-outreach demeanor will signal to journalists that you “speak their language” and that you take their jobs as seriously as they do.

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