

A QUICK SURVEY ON 'INDIAN CORPORATE PRESS RELEASES'

INTRODUCTION

A quick survey was conducted by Prime Point Foundation (www.primepointfoundation.org), as part of October 06 issue of Corporate e-zine PR-e-Sense.

The survey was to get the perspective of PR/CorpComm professionals and the journalists on the 'Corporate Press Releases' released to the media.

A different set of questionnaires were prepared for PR/CorpComm professionals and media persons. They were uploaded in www.surveymonkey.com site and the information was circulated in the various PR/Media groups, inviting the responses anonymously.

38 PR/CorpComm professionals and 23 Journalists responded to the survey and gave their views.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS – PR/CORPCOMM PERSPECTIVE

- Out of 38 respondents , 26 (68%) were from PR Agencies and 12 (32%) were from CorpComm Departments. 19 male members and 18 female members (1 not responded)
- The respondents were from all parts of the country.
- When they were asked to rate **their own press releases**, 22 (60%) respondents rated either 'Excellent or Very Good', 15 (40%) rated themselves as either 'Good or Average.' Nobody rated as 'Poor'. The average rating index was 61%. That means, they have awarded 61.3% marks to their own press releases collectively.
- When they were asked to rate the press releases **prepared by others**, 11 respondents (30%) rated such press releases as "Excellent or Very Good". 26 respondents (70%) rated as 'Good or Average'. Nobody rated them as 'Poor'. The average rating given by the respondents collectively to the press releases prepared by others is 51%. In other words, they have awarded 51% marks to the Press Releases prepared by other colleagues.
- 14 respondents (38%) have felt that they have freedom to prepare the press releases. On the other hand 23 respondents (62%) felt that the Corporates interfere with their press releases and they do not have any freedom. Interestingly, out of this, 23 respondents 15 are from PR Agencies and 8 are from CorpComm departments. Out of the total respondents to this survey, 60 %

of the respondents from PR Agencies and 66 % of the respondents from CorpComm departments feel that they don't have freedom to prepare the press releases and the Corporate Managements interfere with them.

- 75 percent of the respondents translate their press releases into regional language and distribute to the regional media. Others either don't translate or do not send the press notes.
- When the respondents were asked to specify two deficiencies in Corporate Press Releases, generally they were pointing out (1) lack of news / contents (2) advertisement oriented approach (3) use of jargons (4) not following inverted pyramid structure (5) lengthy and unwanted materials, etc. All the views expressed by the respondents are given in **Annexure A**
- Various suggestions to professionalise the drafting of press releases, including training PR/CorpComm officials and sensitizing Corporate Managements on the Media perspective have been given by the respondents. All the suggestions expressed by the respondents are given in **Annexure B**

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS – MEDIA PERSPECTIVE

- The 23 respondents are from various parts of the country.
- Average rating provided by the respondents to the Corporate Press Releases is 47 %.
- The respondents were asked to give two choices as to how they would like to receive the press releases. Out of 23 respondents 14 (64%) preferred email. 9 respondents (41%) preferred to get the email followed by fax and the same number of respondents preferred to get the hard copy. Only 4 respondents (18%) preferred to get the press notes through fax.
- 14 respondents (61%) rated the Corporate press releases issued by Multi National Companies, better than the press releases issued by Indian companies, for their quality of contents and presentation. (more details at **Annexure C**)
- Only 8 respondents (30%) opine that they are able to contact the PR/CorpComm or any other persons and get the required information. Others (70%) feel either they are not able to contact the concerned persons or unable to get the required information, even if they establish contact.
- . The respondents say that they discard 6 out of 10 corporate press releases, on an average, for various reasons.

- Lack of information, using marketing materials in the press releases, lack of contact details, lack of credibility, unprofessional writing, have been pointed out by Media respondents. For more details refer **Annexure D**.
- Media respondents have given few suggestions like (1) improving professionalism (2) avoidance of technical words and jargons, etc. For other details of their suggestions, please refer to **Annexure E**.

CONCLUSIONS

- Generally both PR/CorpComm professionals and Media persons have agreed that the quality of 'Corporate Press Releases' needs to be improved. While PR/CorpComm persons have rated their own press releases at 51%, media persons have rated at 47%.
- Both PR/CorpComm professionals and media professionals agree with the listed deficiencies, like lack of newsworthiness, usage of marketing and promotional information, etc.
- Interference from the Corporate Management, while drafting the press releases seems to be imminent, as more than 60 percent of the PR segment and CorpComm segment have uniformly felt like this. This may be because of the lack of understanding of the 'media functioning' by the Corporate Management Executives.
- Nearly 70 percent of the Media professionals are unable to get in touch with the concerned persons or to get the required information.
- More than 60 percent of the Press Releases are rejected or discarded for various reasons.
- More than 60 percent of the Media professionals prefer to get the press releases through email followed by fax or hard copy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Training programmes need to be organised by the Managements or professional bodies to train / reorient the PR/CorpComm professionals on drafting of Press Releases both in English and Regional languages.
- Corporate CEOs and other Senior Management executives should get themselves acquainted with the 'media functioning'. Professional bodies like CII, FICCI, AIMA may organise brief programmes to Top Management professionals in association with PR bodies. Such programmes should enable CEOs to interact with Senior PR professionals and Media professionals.

ANNEXURE - A

Two deficiencies – pointed out by PR/CorpComm respondents

1. Not all releases are news worthy 2. Not focused on news- Too much of company's details 3. Too much embellishments 4. Explaining more than essential 5. too many pat on the back 6. Incomplete information 7. Lack of complete, background information 8. too long 9. Useage of jargons & advertisement related terminologies 10. TRYING TO BOOST THE CEO, INSTEAD OF BOOSTING THE IMAGE OF THE CORPORATE 11. not much newsworthy content 12. crossing morethan a page 13. Over fed with lots of Information, Just get to the point ASAP 14. where's the news? 15. Either too vague or too specific 16. Omission of basic facts 17. No main content in the first para 18. You & your organisation is not known to Media, in other words absence of media relations 19. lot of unwanted information ,keep the content precise 20. clutter of information / not sufficient information 21. verbose 22. Too verbose 23. Focus is more on the company rather than news 24. absence of quote of the spoke person 25. Extra Polation for More Business 26. News is often not the first thing the journalist sees 27. Boilerplate - they keep saying the same things 28. use of hperboles 29. Content Analysis 30. looks like advertorial 31. More of an advertisement than a news release 32. Lacks News 33. lack of essential details

1. Badly written and very repetitive facts 2. Lack of concise information 3. Every spokesperson's quote seems too similar for them to be actually quoted 4. too eloborate 5. Most of the time not news worthy 6. Quotes from key spokesperson missing 7. key benefit of product/ service is not the main stress of the story 8. too lengthy 9. NON TRANSPARANCY OF THEIR REPORTS 10. more glorification about company, personality et al 11. media contact or web details 12. Structure 13. inadequate key messaging 14. Importance to useless news 15. oo many quotes 16. Shabby media release with spelling mistakes and ugly typing 17. jargon and unexplained acronyms 18. press releases written like a report 19. beat around the bush 20. does not convey news properly 21. Most of them dont follow the 5W / Inward pyramid appraoach. They are flairy rather than being simple 22. relevant financial figures 23. Lack of Truth 24. Too much Info that too not in simplistic terms. 25. Jargon - they keep using tired buzz words that turn the media off (but make the clients feel good) 26. not well stuctured 27. Writing 28. News is not projected directly 29. Lack of Contact Information 30. Chest beating

ANNEXURE - B

Suggestions provided by PR/CorpComm respondents

<u>1.</u>	Quality can be improved by ensuring that the person who creates is a domain expert and understands what makes a perfect news
<u>2.</u>	Press releases should be written like a readymade/printable news item so that journalists have little work to do on them. Releases should be written in the way they appear in newspapers ie. care should be taken to write intro. repetitive facts about company irritate journalists, so cut them short. Give new informations. Follow inverted pyramid stucture.
<u>3.</u>	Keep it short and simple
<u>4.</u>	News audience and media is whom a press release is meant for. Stick to the point, what really is your announcement for that release and it is not any test to assess your knowledge of hi-fi vocabulary, so keep the language simple, easy to understand and straightforward, without beating around the bush.
<u>5.</u>	make it short and simple with just 3/4 page. with just the facts. company details to be kept min and the quotation short
<u>6.</u>	Give One week's time for drafting and getting approval
<u>7.</u>	1. Be thorough with facts 2. A good headline which communicates well 3. Important information in opening paragraph itself 4. A good quote to lend credibility 5. Contact people clearly mentioned and available for any clarification
<u>8.</u>	Not very sure. I am still learning it myself.
<u>9.</u>	Brevity, Benefit to be the key points of the press release.
<u>10.</u>	Press Release should talk the facts and figures in a very elucidative language so as to be understood by the journalists and then by the ordinary readers upon its publication.
<u>11.</u>	BE BRIEF AND TO THE POINT. BE STRAIGHT FORWARD. EXPLAIN THE JOURNALIST THE REALITY AND IMPORTANCE. THATS ENOUGH, BUT NOT THE LEAST THAT KEEP GOOD PERSONAL RAPO WITH THE PERSON WHO COVERS YOUR SECTOR.
<u>12.</u>	one standard format with the key message to be given as a summary
<u>13.</u>	a press release with news in the first para, event in the second para, company profile in the last para in simple english with media contacts and web address is an ideal PR.
<u>14.</u>	Sense of news is a priority, newspapers want news so make sure your press release is news worthy.
<u>15.</u>	Press release should contain the date, time, place, men involved and the angle for

	which it is released. Or else the news becomes onesided and a propaganda rather than news
<u>16.</u>	Title to bear company's name and it should be crisp and catchy. Keep the press content comprehensive and if possible in one page.
<u>17.</u>	Emphasise the angle of the press release while minding the language and length duly authenticating with full details of the sender/writer.
<u>18.</u>	In the top left corner write the name of the company and the name, phone number, e-mail address and other contact information of the person responsible for follow-ups. In the top right corner specify if it is 'For immediate release' or for release at a later date.
<u>19.</u>	the Press release should always avoid jargons and lingos - should be crisp and to the point, in the company's letterhead with contact details - the contact details of both the company spokesperson as well as the PR agency contact.
<u>20.</u>	should be brief, to the point and in simple language.
<u>21.</u>	There has to be a proper training and briefing by the client to the PR Agency or by the Company Management to the Corporate Communications Department on the desired communication style and objectives. On this basis the writer can then strike the balance between the company interest (press release drafting) and the Reader Interest (sending to media).
<u>22.</u>	A synopsis of the news / press release should precede the release. Appropriate linkers in the synopsis to that in the release should be there (limit it to 4-5 main USP's). Time is key and hence the synopsis helps the person reading at the other end (in most cases journalist's) to get the crux almost instantly. He / she can always then link to the press note for more information
<u>23.</u>	Interference of the senior people will always be there while preparing the Press Release. Its better to educate the senior executives by way of "10 commands" how to write a proper Press Release. They should be educated about the Media prespective.
<u>24.</u>	People try to grab opportunities from others clients so field has become very competitive that creates people to show a lot of manmade facts which are not true
<u>25.</u>	It should be short and focused. Journos do not have time to read and search for news. The language has to be simplistic with not too many terms, for which to understand one might need to open a dictionary. Clients should not interfere so much so that the news loses it's importance, for everyone self is important but the PR as a professional will know and guide a news and it's media release better.
<u>26.</u>	Write press releases to one of two goals: a. Write them as if they are news stories; write them in a way that an editor could just "drop them in" to a news hole (they won't, for the most part, but it helps a lot to write them as if you're a reporter instead of a PR Flak) b. Write them with the aim of getting a reporter to pick up

the phone and say, "I've got to talk to your client about this story." In other words, write it as a "sales tool" aimed at motivating a reporter to a specific, positive action. Too often, releases are written as if they are either legal documents (for public companies, they are, but they don't have to sound that way) or ego-strokes for the client. Neither generate press coverage. If you need a legal notice, label it as such - put it on the wire as a benchmark but don't pretend it's a "real" press release. If you need to stroke egos, have clients buy an ad - not corrupt the press release process (and devalue all the company's press releases, weakening the overall PR process).

27. Need to understand the media

28. 1. It should speak truth and should be straight 2. Use of jargons should be avoided
3. Technical terms should be defined properly

29. Reduce superfluous words and keep strictly to facts

30. Clear about what is it intended to achieve - Target Market - Media specific.

31. Corporate should understand how media works and what media needs. Otherwise, most of the corporates write/Suggest the press releases as per their requirements, but not as per the requirements of the media....This requires lots of media training sessions to the corporates/Spokes persons.

32. Content. It's important to think from the news and journalists point of view. In today's time, journalists prefer to receive press release which is ready made news.

ANNEXURE – C

Comparison of MNC Press Releases and local press releases

1. not much to choose 2. MNCs are more professional 3. quite professional 4. Generally, the MNCs seem more apt at informing the media as per their needs, the traditional companies do not do so most of the times 5. MNCs write-ups give a feeling reader that he/she also has some scope to look into it in terms of utility. very clear communication and clarity in the visualisation 6. More professional with follow up and ready point of contact. 7. mnc-s releases r better and to the point. IT releases r a shade better and newsworthy. indian traditional company releases r often wayward. 8. better 9. Indian Companies have improved a lot in this regard. Some are even better in quality. 10. Professionals are always professionals. 11. the latter are better 12. equally bad or good--- in insufficient data, more verbose 13. MNC releases are more professional. Indian IT companies are boastful. Old economy Indian companies are okay. 14. MNCs releases are better 15. MNCs presentation and puch line are more attractive than traditional companies 16. No difference in content. Only the stationery, font and colour varies. MNCs usually deliver their matter in aneat manner, with released placed in well-designed folders and give supplementary phample 17. Not so much difference. But our PR firms are capable of making communicative and news worthy press re;eases. 18. good, our companies do a fairly good job 19. MNCs provide press releases which need no editing, but Indian corporates need to fine tune their language 20. They are more or less the same 21. No scope for comparison 22. The former are more comprehensive, better written, and worded. The IT companies are better than the other Indian companies, but the quality is definitely not comparable to the MNCs

ANNEXURE – D

Media perspective of ‘Corporate Press Releases’ – Two deficiencies

1. inordinately long 2. Self Esteem 3. paucity of focus 4. Orthodoxy. Needs of TV and Print Media are very different. Still, there is a common release that we receive. 5. failing in in depth communication language 6. STORY RELATED CONTACTS 7. the news points r often missing 8. no news point 9. Most of them not short 10. Either its too long or too short 11. simple language 12. Press RIs must not have any visuals, graphics, fancy fonts, etc because, it takes that much more time to download, copy and de-format. No newspaper or agency takes any formatted stuff... 13. Lacks news 14. unnecessary details 15. Misplaced zeal 16. cliched and similar words all the time 17. The main point will be in the last part 18. too businesslike 19. They do not provide adequate details that we want. 20. The marketing strategy of the company is apparent 21. not focussed well 22. Leaves some questions and the product or service unanswered

1. seldom make the point that makes news 2. Not with details 3. inappropriate vocabulary 4. The element of saleability is missing at times 5. crispnes 6. BACKGROUND INFO 7. usually lenthly and wayward 8. to much fluff 9. Lacking the real news edge 10. Bilingual press releases should be given importance - press releases should be in tamil and English 11. approach to the issue 12. Press Releases should be short sentences, precise, with information only, nothing else. PRs we get in India are terribly complex. 13. Lacks responsible contact person details 14. lack of professionalism 15. dressing in fine words 16. Artificial 17. Superlatives weakens credibility 18. lack of sufficient background about companies 19. Most press releases are written in a clumsy manner 20. Little attention is paid to project the news angle in the press release 21. inappropriate language 22. If it concerns a new project , the financial details are not mentioned clearly

ANNEXURE – E

Suggestions provided by Media respondents

1. get them written by people who understand news 2. It should have all details about their services/Consumer Goods or their corporate details 3. New companies need to present background clearly. The companies mission or vision statements ought to match their activities. 4. NA 5. take enough time in reaching the task. the amount of pressure is reflected on the work of art. sometimes we find the lack of visualisation and lack the sensitivity and sensibility in understanding the psychology of the public. 6. should be more news worthy. usually the releases r more of a propaganda type. that should be avoided. 7. 1. we are here for news, not PR. press releases don't get the difference. 2. the PR agency should know how to sell the story...man bites dog is old hat but sells still 8. PR should work on their specific logos. Brevity is the soul of wit. 9. PR writing is an art. Needs to be very formal and precise and correct. Indian PR agencies need to learn that. Many forget to distinguish between PR writing and writing ad copy, so their copy has almost no info but lot of praise for company, which is useless to a media person. Also, some agencies differ from others, as business agencies/newspapers differ from others... while, sending PR matter PR agencies need to know what story should be sent to which agency/paper... not all copy is suitable for all the PR agency only burdens the media person by not filtering.

10. 1. Mention the full name of the company including its legal status - limited/private limited/partnership firm or proprietary company. 2. Dont boast about the company. It will not impress me but certainly would depress me. 3. Give all the information on the subject matter of the release. 4. Give the name and contact numbers of the company's CEO/Section head who can answer the queries immediately. We are not interested in having just the PR agency's number or even the corporate communication manger's name and number. 5. Mention the URL of the company website. 11. Recruit professionals to improve copy. 12. Local flavour should be there 13. I hope PR people understand the way newspaper works. It will help them greatly if they understand the deadline of various publications and supplements. They should stop nagging us my making calls and calls after sending us a press release. Please, it may be their duty and are getting paid for it. But they fail to understand that they are hindering our work. They have to be courteous enough to drop journalists back in office when they pick them up to cover an event or interview. Finally, no artifcal smiles and greetings please. If they are so concerned and friendly, let them send new year greetings. But no one does such gesture. I really get irritated with such plastic and artificial behaviour. Let them just be themselves, tell the facts clearly and stop with that. We do not publish the matter for their sake, but for whatever the press release is worth. 14. Press release should be written for the public through the media. It should carry some new happenings ie. news. It should be customer friendly, but usually it happens to be written for pleasing the company directors.

Press release should be transparent. Avoid technical terms and confusing financial jargons. Follow up is a must. Read what appeared in the newspaper in the coming day and compare with your copy. Home work can do wonders. [15](#). The PR agencies need to provide the news and not the glamorous company details. [16](#). corporate comm people should understand the importance communication, especially when they are preparing the Press Releases and they should understand the importance of the time [17](#). Use professional help to draft press releases, and try not to cheat the reporter of information. Being honest is very important in public relations.

The survey was conducted, analysed and report prepared by K. Srinivasan, Foudner, Prime Point Foundation, Chennai - www.primepointfoundation.org
Email : prpoint@gmail.com Contact : 91 44 28144285 . 91 94440 50273