

NC STATE

Think and Do
ncsu.edu

Welcome to Kill the Press Release: Earn Huge On-Brand Media Coverage Through Unconventional Strategies

- Mick Kulikowski and Matt Shipman – NC State News Services
- Strategic communications counsel, media relations, research news, internal communications, crisis communications



Press release 101

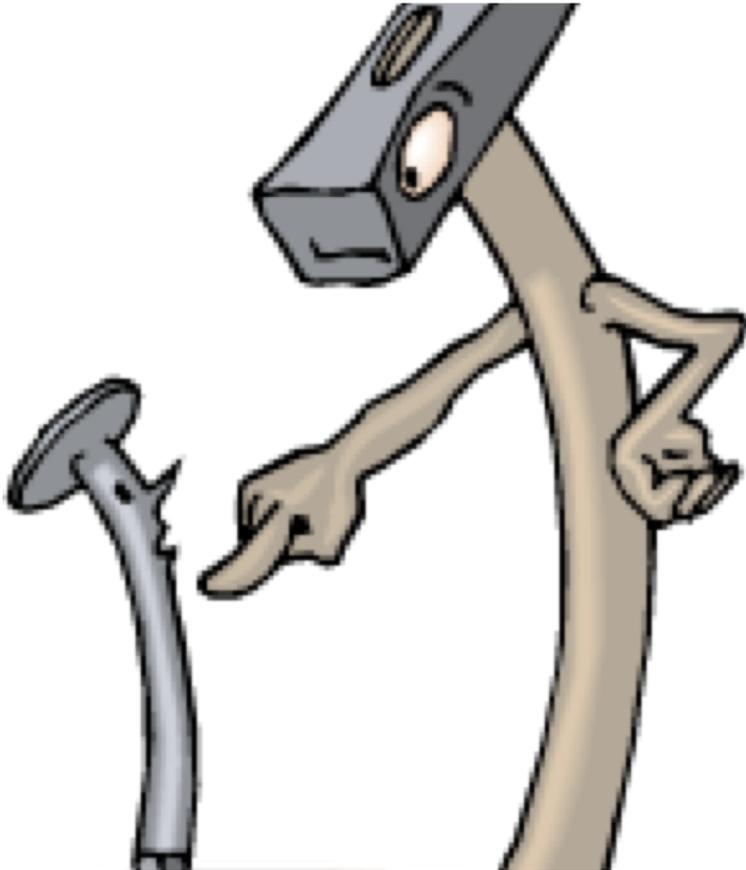
A means to convey information to key audiences?

A communication strategy?

An overused and misunderstood crutch?

Yes.

When holding a hammer ...



Why use a press release?

- Why not? Most widely used tool, it must do *something*
- Measurable – sort of
- Easy
- Source/background
- Resource for “churnalists”
- Easy to blame

When can it work?

- When content dictates – real news
- When it fits for your target audiences
- Lots of content, a resource for journalists

When it fails

- When it's not news – it won't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear
- Bad timing
- Unnecessary – a two-sentence pitch will suffice
- Wrong tactic for your audience

Two things to remember

- Unsolicited news releases are basically spam
- Don't be the boy who cried wolf – if everything is news, nothing is news

Not a magic bullet

- It's a communication tool – not a communication strategy
- Those who aren't communicators shouldn't be expected to know the difference between strategy and tactics
- Onus is on us to provide good counsel

Do I need a press release?

- Don't do it just to do it – make sure you're doing it for good reason
- Be a student of your field and an expert in your domain
- Consultative and collaborative
- Objective first, communications strategy second

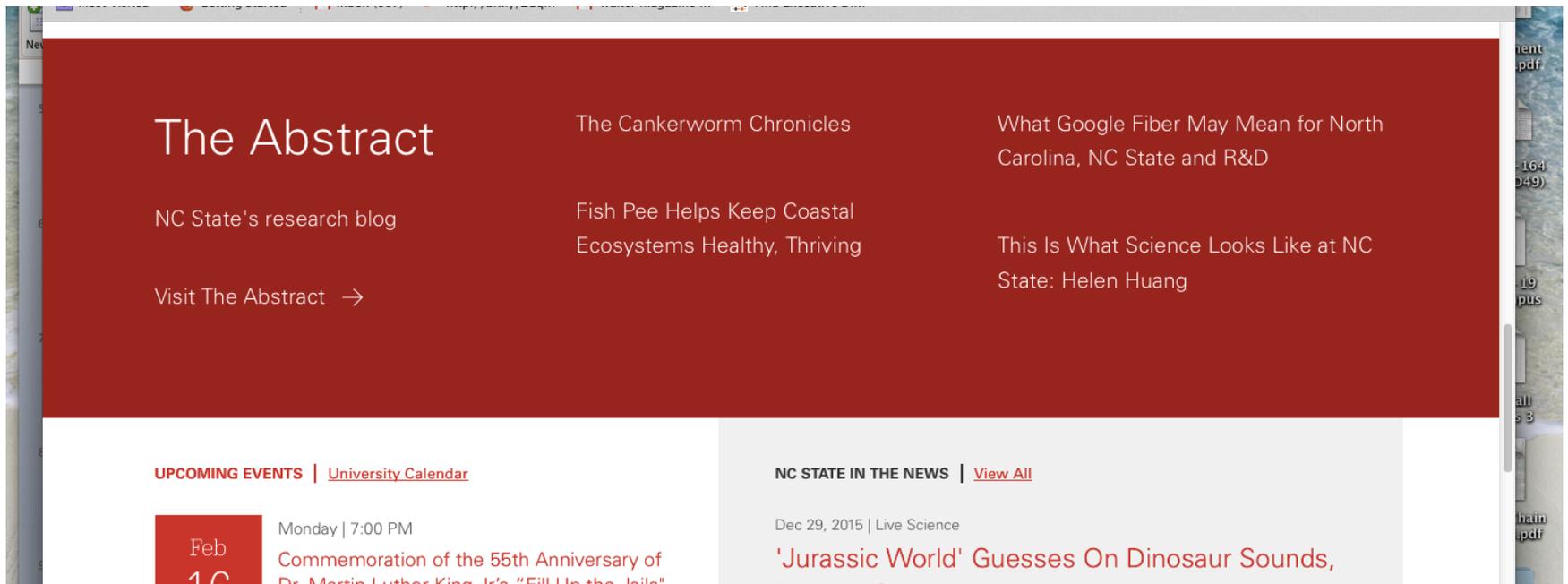
NC State's approach

- We start with the business objective first – and tailor strategy and tactics to match.
- We focus on campus strategic goals. For us, that means more emphasis on research findings and practical applications of research, like economic development, startup companies and jobs.
- We quit sweating the small stuff. Campus news runs in campus news outlets; there's no need for a press release
- We focus on content that matters, and we target the audiences that care most about the subject at hand

Outcomes

- Outcomes AND strategy: We started a research blog (2010) to share more research news with an ever-burgeoning online audience – and to facilitate pitches to reporters
- From 330 press releases per year in 2000 to 180 per year ... yet media placements are higher than ever before

Alternatives to the press release



Does it work?

- Dialect map: *NY Times* story of the year ...
- Launchpad for pitches that led to a host of other features in national outlets from *National Geographic* to *NPR*
- If it didn't work, we wouldn't keep doing it

Op-ed case study

- A university administrator thinks paper of record will run three separate stories on similar NC State successes; suggests three press releases
- We counter with a better idea: an op-ed from the administrator that synthesizes all three items into one 600-word opinion piece
- We placed in the local newspaper and reused the piece as a campus letter from the administrator
- Result: happy leadership

When someone demands a release

- Who is the audience? What is the message/goal?
- Is it for internal audiences?
- Would social media work better?
- Talk through the options – make them part of the process, and don't leave them empty-handed.

If you remember nothing else ...

- News releases *can* be effective – but can also be a waste of time
- There are other tools in the toolbox: social media, blogs, direct pitches, op-eds
- Know your audience and your goal for each news item – that will inform the tactic you use to accomplish your goal
- Use the press release wisely – and sparingly – and you will succeed