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

The Abstract

NC State's research blog

Visit The Abstract →

The Cankerworm Chronicles

Fish Pee Helps Keep Coastal Ecosystems Healthy, Thriving

What Google Fiber May Mean for North Carolina, NC State and R&D

This Is What Science Looks Like at NC State: Helen Huang
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