



No More Homeless Pets Forum
June 20-24, 2005

All About News Releases

Would you like to make your news releases the best they can be? **Lynne Ouchida** of Humane Society of Central Oregon and **John Van Zante** of Helen Woodward Animal Center will answer your questions about how to get your news out to the media and in print! You can also submit one of your news releases for Lynne or John to edit.

Introduction from Lynne Ouchida:

It doesn't matter how important you think your message is - if the media does not respond, you are just yelling in the desert. After 12 years of creating promotional and educational materials and news releases for the Humane Society of Central Oregon, I have developed a style that gets a response from our local media. We are no longer content with just being one of the many nonprofits vying for media attention. We are committed to being the most visible nonprofit in town.

News releases that are run-of-the-mill, dull, missing information, and difficult to understand will be given a lower priority by the media. After building positive working relationships with key media representatives in radio, television, print and Internet sources, I provide them with a format that fits a variety of needs. One release can get an event listed in an events calendar, provide a copy-and-paste article, or grab someone's attention enough to send a reporter and camera crew out to get the story.

Introduction from John Van Zante:

For 26 years, I was the radio guy receiving your news releases. When I interviewed for the PR manager job at Helen Woodward Animal Center (HWAC), I explained that I knew what worked and what didn't work. If they would hire me, I wouldn't do what didn't work. And they fell for it! That was six years ago. Since then, HWAC has generated more publicity than ever before. You can do it, too, by following some basic rules and creating relationships with your local news media. One-page news releases with a catchy headline and a strong opening paragraph make your local media "look good" for telling your story - resulting in more media coverage for you!

Lynne Ouchida Bio:

Lynne Ouchida is the community outreach coordinator for the Humane Society of Central Oregon in Bend, Oregon. Her job title covers public relations, humane education, and volunteer coordinating.

Graduating college with an interest in underdeveloped countries, the farthest occupation from her mind was animal welfare. Lynne became a partner in a startup business manufacturing and marketing a product to U.S. and Canadian consumers. It involved obtaining endorsements from major league baseball players and trainers, and creating press kits, releases, and advertisements for this market. After an intense few years, Lynne realized the business world was not her career of choice. Then Aussi, an Australian shepherd, entered her life.

Unlike most people in animal welfare, Lynne had only one family dog growing up. Fascinated by the human/animal bond and the intelligence of dogs, she sought out knowledge from anyone willing to give it. During the search, she met a Humane Society of Central Oregon (HSCO) board member who got her on the fundraising committee. From there it grew into a 12-year involvement with the organization as a volunteer and employee.

Job titles at HSCO were primarily volunteer and events coordinator, media relations director, humane educator, and community outreach coordinator. Lynne's dogs Aussi and Sydney have passed their job of educating the community on to Maty, a great canine ambassador with three legs.

The city of Bend has grown from 20,000 in 1990 to 65,000 today. Keeping pace with a rapidly growing community is one of the challenges. Animal welfare is a 24/7 job, as Lynne shares her life with the animal welfare director of the same humane society and lives with Maty and a feline named Kona.

John Van Zante Bio:

A lifelong animal lover, John Van Zante began a career in radio broadcasting in 1973. As an on-air personality and reporter, John worked in various radio formats ranging from alternative rock music to country, classical, and conservative talk.

In 1999 he answered a new calling when he accepted the position of public relations manager at Helen Woodward Animal Center in Rancho Santa Fe, California. Since that time, John has been instrumental in the development and promotion of the international "Home 4 the Holidays" pet adoption drive. Starting with just 14 animal shelters in 1999, the adoption drive grew to include more than 1,700 animal shelters worldwide during the 2004 holiday season, completing more than 313,000 adoptions.

John is the father of three "adults" (that's a bit scary) and the grandfather of three. His "furry kids" include the best black and brown dog in the entire universe (Howie), the best blonde Labrador/Great Dane mix in history (Radlie), and Tigger, a rescued cat that John is quite allergic to.

A Fresh Slant on Old News

Question from Judith:

I represent the House Rabbit Society, and coming up with a "new slant" on an old message (rabbits at Easter, for example) is a real challenge.

A recent response from our CBS affiliate was "don't you have anything new?" Well, no. Impulse buys of rabbits at Easter is still an ongoing problem and one that needs to be communicated to the public. How do I take an "ongoing" issue and put a new slant on it, in order to get more attention?

Also, we've been reliant on a local animal foundation who has an 'in' with local news media, to get our rabbits on a few of the TV stations for adoption promotion. But, it's few and far between, and sometimes we get stuck between the philosophies of this person and their other contacts or former employers. How can we work to get consistent coverage for our rabbits, without having to depend upon a third party who may not always have our best interests in mind?

Response from John Van Zante:

While rabbits don't get the television "face time" that dogs and cats do, so much of the publicity that we generate for our shelters and rescue groups boils down to two things. (My apology in advance for this. I'll probably refer to it several times this week.)

1. How can we make it easy for the news media to tell our stories?
2. How can we make them look good for talking about what we do?

The CBS and ABC and NBC and Fox and WB and UPN affiliates all ask us the same questions. "What makes this news worthy? Can you give us something different?" (Translation: Will this be easy for us to cover and will we look good to our viewers for telling your story?)

Before anything else, we have to get their attention. Their news assignment desk is opening a couple hundred news releases every day. What makes our release stick out? Does it have a catchy headline? (Single male looking for long term relationship. Only bunny lovers need apply.)

If you're mailing your release to them, what makes your release stand out above the rest? (A drawing of a rabbit face with some pipe cleaner whiskers attached. No... not a big deal. But they will definitely stop to look at it, increasing the chances that they'll follow up with you.)

If you have the time and the gasoline to hand-deliver a few releases once in a while, bring along a bunny and wrap your news release around a carrot with a bow. Ask to speak directly with someone in the news

department. Don't be insulted if they say "No". They'll still take your release with the carrot and some of the people in the office will want to come out to meet your bunny...which will filter back to the news room.

How to secure consistent coverage for your rabbits? Build relationships. Position your group as the rabbit experts. You need to be in the Rolodex of every TV station, Radio station, Newspaper, and Magazine in your area as their number one resource for anything rabbit related. You ARE the rabbit information source. Then make sure that you are available... always... weekends and holidays... 5:30 am or 11:00 pm. When they do contact House Rabbit Society, chances are that they need an answer NOW! Tomorrow is too late. This afternoon is too late. Call them now, even if all you can tell them is that you won't have the information for an hour. Be their resource. Make them look good. Make their job easier.

Response from Lynne Ouchida:

Creating a "new slant" on an old message challenges everyone - for profit or not. The national Adopt-a-Rabbit month promotion was refreshing for those who have been through one too many Adopt-A-Cat/Dog months.

One option to reach for is bringing in fresh ideas from your target audience. Poll random people on what they think would be informative or interesting and you will be surprised at the catchy tag-lines people can come up with. If you have been in the field for a few years, ask for a new perspective.

An example of what the Humane Society of Central Oregon did for this year's rabbit promotion included the "Make Mine Chocolate" (www.makeminechocolate.org) campaign. When we did one of our regular radio or television spots we gave the DJ or newscasters a chocolate bunny. This gave them something to talk about and made it 'fresh' and memorable to them. We also used this time to thank a generous donor for creating a rabbit spay/neuter fund and encouraged people to contribute. The donor's current house rabbit was found on the golf course in front of her house.

One of the activities for our new shelter open house in late February included youth demonstrating bunny 'agility' or 'jumps.' It was a huge success with the visitors and intrigued the television station to air footage and an interview on the amazing abilities of rabbits. Anything to promote rabbits as being a fun, integral part of the family beyond housing in a cage.

Send intriguing photos with your releases on how to properly keep a rabbit in the home. A photo of a bunny with diapers on while he was still house training got a lot of attention from our media. I'm sure you know someone who has a fun design for an area for a rabbit to have free roam time. A photo might intrigue the media to send out a reporter. There were nearly 20 rabbits dumped in the forest just outside of town. We took footage with a digital camera and the television station aired it because they were

appalled someone could do this. Technology today makes it easy to get compelling images to the media. Be sure to insert the photo into the text of your email, rather than send it as an attachment (which may be misconstrued as a virus and cause your entire email--release and all--to be deleted without review). If the photos are too large to insert, you can send a teaser, thumbnail-sized insert and let them know you can provide a larger, higher resolution file upon request. Or, post the photos on your website and refer them to the link.

Provide quotes from people who have experienced buying a rabbit around Easter for their child and why it did not work for them. Testimonials are often taken with a fresh look versus sounding stale and preachy from the same old animal organization. For my education booth I created a simple flyer with a catchy quote and photos of a baby bunny at the time of purchase, progressing to the full-grown rabbit at the time it was surrendered to the shelter. Most people do not know the reality of rescue organizations.

Create positive relations with your local TV station and ask for air time. If this is not possible, build alliances with shelters who get air time and you also rescue rabbits from their shelter. Hopefully they respect your group for your expertise and you can provide them with the information to repeat on air. During our Santa photo promotions one of our pet of the week TV spots included a rabbit dressed up in a scarf just like the kitten being held next to it. We received phone calls and letters from people saying thank you for including rabbits in the festive occasion. And yes, we did see more rabbits sitting on Santa's lap.

In regards to building relations with your media, provide information/statistics on what you do and the number of rabbits you rescue from other shelters who are overwhelmed. Demonstrate that you provide a service to the community just like the animal shelters who care for the cats and dogs. Find a media personality who has a rabbit (or adopt one to a high profile media personality) and build a strong relationship. If one media outlet starts to talk about rabbits, it will grab the interest of the competition.

Getting your message out via the media and keeping it fresh is on-going work. Your group has a difficult task and you have all my respect.

News Releases 101

Question from Sandi:

How can we make a press release out of this flyer? How much info should we include? We are an all volunteer, 501(c)3 non-profit exotic bird rescue and sanctuary. We have no one on the board or on staff familiar with press releases or how to get them noticed. Thank you!

Fine Feathered Friends Sanctuary Inc. is on the move!

2410 Daniels Street, suite F, Madison WI 53718 608 222-6420 www.Feathered-Friends.com

In Jan. 2002, Randy and Sandi Meinholz had a dream. By June 30th 2005 that dream will be well on its way to coming true. We have located the perfect area for the sanctuary, purchased the land and are building a brand new sanctuary building. There will be on-going projects, such as outdoor flights etc. but the main dream will be completed.

This property is a real Parrotise. Weeping Willow trees, peace and quiet (at least until we move the birds in) and even a pond. This is a huge undertaking for FFFS but our wonderful group of volunteers have been working day and night to make it happen.

As you may imagine, a project of this type needs huge amounts of cash. Our estimates bring the totals to approximately \$300,000.00. Now that isn't parrot seed but we also have some great fund raisers coming up and faith that someone up there is watching over us to help us succeed. 100% of the proceeds from these events go into our building fund. We also have launched a Capitol Campaign to help raise the much needed funding. All donations are tax deductible.

We will have engraved bricks available for sale as well as naming opportunities for individual rooms.

We appreciate any donation at all and request that if you make a donation, mark building fund on it so we know what it is to be used for.

This is all very exciting and a bit overwhelming at the same time, but we are tired of having the birds in two small warehouse buildings. The new building will have proper quarantine area, medical area, 5000 sq ft space for the birds, separate visiting rooms for potential adopters, an educational room, laundry, shower, kitchen etc. The grounds are beautiful and will allow us to give tours to scouting groups and classrooms, working more to the education end of things.

Thank you for the opportunity to tell you our exciting news, pictures will be available soon on our website if you'd like to watch this miracle in progress. If you live in the area, we are also asking for volunteers to donate sweat equity. We need skilled contractors to help keep the costs down, electricians, plumbers, drywall, paint etc. We need you and the birds need you so if you have some time and a talent, please give a holler, it's the perfect time of year for this and we must have the building up and functional by fall.

Response from John Van Zante:

First, let's call them "News" releases or "Media" releases. I've met News Directors in the electronic media who will ask, "Anybody see any presses?" then toss the release in the recycle bin. Yep, I know it's dumb. But why take the chance?

Let's begin with a catchy, visual headline to get the news editors to read your release.

"We're flapping our wings and flying to a new bird house! Fine Feathered Friends is on the move!"

Next, make sure that you're not "burying the lead line". The purpose of this news release is to tell the news media and the public that you are moving. That should be the first thought that you relay in your release.

"They won't be flying to their new home, but the birds at Fine Feathered Friends Sanctuary (FFFS) will definitely have more room to spread their wings. On June 30 volunteers will move the birds from the two small warehouses where they have been staying into a new, 5,000 square foot sanctuary."

Because time is so limited in broadcast media, let's tell the story in the first and last paragraphs. With the first paragraph I give a 2 - 3 sentence outline of the story. With the last paragraph I tell how to get more information. This makes it easy for an overworked news writer on deadline to grab your release and go on the air with a minimum of effort.

"To learn more or to make a donation to Fine Feathered Friends Sanctuary call 608-222-6420 or log on to feathered-friends.com."

The details with some quotes give writers an opportunity to create several versions of the story (with little effort) and it gives print media an opportunity to make the story fit the space available.

FFFS founders Randy and Sandi Meinholz say the idea for the move came in the form of a dream in January 2002. "We knew that we had to provide more space for the birds to live, larger medical and quarantine areas, and visiting rooms where potential adopters would meet the orphaned birds in need of families. The opening of this new facility is the first step in making our dream come true."

I love the use of Parrot terms! (Make them look good for telling your story. Make them look like they all love the birds as much as you do.) Don't forget to add pronunciations so some poor news anchor who has never seen your release doesn't screw it up on the air. For example.... Parrotise (Paradise). We don't want them to have any problems when they read your release on the air.

Let's put it all together in an abbreviated version:

"We're flapping our wings and flying to a new bird house! Fine Feathered Friends is on the move!"

Madison, WI. -- They won't be "flying" to their new home, but the birds at Fine Feathered Friends Sanctuary (FFFS) will definitely have more room to spread their wings. On June 30 volunteers will move the birds from the two small warehouses where they have been staying into a new, 5,000 square foot sanctuary.

FFFS founders Randy and Sandi Meinholz say the idea for the move came in the form of a dream in January 2002. "We knew that we had to provide more space for the birds to live, larger medical and quarantine areas, and visiting rooms where potential adopters would meet the orphaned birds in need of families. The opening of this new facility is the first step in making our dream come true."

Volunteers describe the new property as a real Parrotise (Paradise) with Weeping Willow trees, peace and quiet (at least until we move the birds in) and even a pond. Sandi Meinholz says, "This is a huge undertaking for FFFS but our wonderful group of volunteers have been working day and night to make it happen."

The completed facility is expected to cost approximately \$300,000.00. (That isn't parrot seed!) FFFS is accepting tax deductible donations. Supporters can also purchase engraved bricks to be used in the new sanctuary. A limited number of naming opportunities are also available.

To learn more or to make a donation to Fine Feathered Friends Sanctuary call 608-222-6420 or log on to www.feathered-friends.com.

Response from Lynne Ouchida:

An example of what I might do with this is:

Fine Feathered Friends Sanctuary Inc.

2410 Daniels Street Suite F
Madison WI 53718
608 222-6420 ~ www.Feathered-Friends.com

For Immediate Release: **date**

Contact: **(name and include all numbers to reach you)**

Capital Campaign Launched to Build Parrotise

Paradise for our fine feathered friends is in flight and the dream needs your help. The Fine Feathered Friends Sanctuary has launched a \$300,000 capital campaign to build a sanctuary for birds in need **(or a better description of the number and types of birds you care for)**.

(Describe your current housing situations and compare it to the new plans.) Paradise will be found amongst the tranquil weeping willows, outdoor flights and pond. The birds will be housed and cared for properly in the new 5,000 sq. ft bird area and will benefit from the quarantine and medical treatment rooms. **(Add a quote on why the improvements are important)**

Visitors will find their experience enchanting as they get acquainted with the birds in separate rooms and the community will benefit from the educational opportunities found in the new community room for educational classes and presentations.

The project will need more than bird seed and you can be a part of building a dream. Randy and Sandi Meinholz will be glad to share their dream with you and how your monetary and in-kind donations can help. All donations are tax-deductible and can be sent to xxx . For more information call 608 222-6420 or visit our website at www.Feathered-Friends.com to find out how you can help.

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Attach a warm and fuzzy photo of a bird or birds with people. Present an image that shows why someone should help - maybe a photo of a bird with an elderly person or youth.

Have you had a 'ground-breaking' ceremony for the media? Our ground breaking ceremony included a dog in a hard hat sitting in the seat of a 'Bobcat' and a kitten in a toy dump truck. These provided great photo opportunities for the media.

Whoever is your contact should be prepared to have on-hand background information and statistics, and what the improvements will be the costs and why they are important. Put the drawing of your new sanctuary on your website along with the new amenities. List donor possibilities from naming opportunities to how to buy a brick. Update your website with photos as the building progresses and post your current needs.

Most of this information should be found in your capital campaign information packet. Best of luck to you on this big endeavor. We just moved into our new shelter and we are truly appreciating the positive changes for the animals and people.

Dealing with media inaccuracies

Question from Patricia:

Our shelter and rescue have a good relationship with our local weekly newspaper. They usually feature a pet photo and often do feature stories about our projects.

Our problem is that the printed info is often wrong. We are misquoted, and the facts aren't straight, even when we give the reporter written facts and figures. Should we ask to review the article before press time?

Response from Lynne Ouchida:

First of all, it is great that you have established a good rapport with your local newspaper. That is a good beginning to finding a resolution to the problem of incorrect information.

Do you work with the same reporters or staff people on a regular basis? If your working relationship with them allows you to bring-up the issue, you can address it in a positive and constructive manner that will benefit your organization as well as the newspaper. I am sure that your local paper wants to report the news accurately, so it would be mutually beneficial. Ask how you can assist in getting the information to them in a format that works best for them.

If your working relationship makes directly addressing the issue uncomfortable, you can make some suggestions on how they receive your information. You might ask if a new method that seems to work well for your organization can be incorporated in how they receive your information. Anything to reduce time on their end will probably be considered.

In regards to the pet of the week, I can suggest the method that we use for ALL of our spots. Our local daily paper runs a half-page ad that prints twelve photos with a description and donation form in a weekly advertising edition. We also send pets of the week to two weekly papers, an on-line media service and three business sponsored pet of the week advertisements in papers. We email a digital photo in the resolution and size that fits the requirements of the papers along with matching descriptions in the text length that fits the space requirements. This allows the papers to copy and paste the text to a photo that can be cropped if needed. All information is sent directly to the person responsible for creating the ad. Once a good rapport is established, if there is ever a question they will ask you first.

Having the luxury of reviewing an article before print no longer exists. The one thing that has not changed is that reporters want to report with integrity and accuracy. They do ask for feedback and give me the luxury of running by me the message they are going with or what they ended-up using due to deadlines. Our on-line news reporter would allow corrections if I felt they were needed - one of the positives of the medium.

It does take work and a lot of heartfelt thank yous to establish these working relationships. Remember to tell them how wonderful a good article was and why! When we get a good response from the community on a story, we make a point of telling the reporter that their story brought in the response we were hoping for (whether it is food and supplies, money or attendance at an event). The good old fashioned thank you cards are greatly appreciated. Many cards I've sent to businesses or reporters are sitting out for everyone to see. Include a photo of the event or subject that they covered in their story. My last thank you card to the reporter who did a great story on our need for kitten food and supplies included a photo of our empty shelves and then full shelves after the story.

Provide the news release in the format that suits the needs of your media. I send all releases out in a word document as an attachment to email. This seems to work for everyone in my media group (although in other communities attachments are strongly discouraged).

When I send out a release I provide them the information necessary to copy and paste a story. In animal welfare you can always create a catchy title and a good photograph will always grab attention. Let your first and last paragraphs provide the key information. The middle part of your release can provide further details, tell how it affects your community and what they can do, why this information is important and provide a quote if you can. Once you establish yourself as a reliable source of information and the release is written well, you will find your words printed quite often verbatim.

If your organization is being interviewed, make sure your representative states your message in an interesting and clear manner. Try not to let the interviewer take you into territory you do not want to go.

Take the story back to your message and reiterate it several times in the piece. When they edit for quotes or sound bites, your strong and clear message will hopefully be the only option.

Good luck on an issue that effects everyone.

Response from John Van Zante:

Great questions about a very common problem for all of us!

First, let me explain my "prejudice". Before coming to work at Helen Woodward Animal Center, I spent 26 years in radio broadcasting. We old radio guys would tell you "When you hear it, it's news. When you read it, it's history." My buddy Shawn Underwood, Communications Representative at PETCO and a former newspaper editor, would tell you "When you hear it, it's a rumor. When you read it, it's fact."

What surprises me most about your question is that they're still getting your information wrong after you send it to them in written form! Radio and TV reporters may sometimes use a clip out of context, your words on tape are still your words coming out of your mouth as you said them. I have worked with lots of print media reporters who rely on scribbled notes to come up with the "quotes" they use. In those cases all we can realistically hope for is that they capture the essence of what we say and keep it in context. (In other words, put the right answer with the right question... the same as we want the radio or TV reporters to do.)

Chances of getting the newspaper to send you materials for review before they go to print are very slim. I would even guess that they would be insulted if you asked them for this.

How are you delivering your information to this newspaper? Are you talking to them face to face? Are you speaking with them over the telephone? Are you sending them news releases or other information in a fax or via e-mail?

Helen Woodward Animal Center had one newspaper that was having a consistent problem with inaccuracies. We called the editor and asked a lot of questions about how we could make it easier for them to run our stories. We learned about their particular style of writing and how they determine which stories they will print. They told us that the best thing we could do is to "deliver" our initial news releases to them in a fax. The editor would read it and decide whether or not they would be running the story. If they decided to use the story, they would send us an e-mail requesting that we send them the release again via e-mail in the form of a Word file. (This also gave us an opportunity to attach a digital photo to compliment the story. They may not use the photo, but they always opened it and looked at the animal!)

Once we found out what they wanted and how they wanted it, we could basically write the story for them the way they wanted it. They would "cut and paste" what we sent them. The inaccurate quotes ended.

Along with this, I put together news releases in a way that allows them to use the first and last paragraphs to tell our story. If they find that they did not have as much room as the originally thought, we've already made it easy for them to edit our release into a shorter version.

Be careful. We don't want to see you "win the battle and lose the war" over this. Ask how you can make it easier for them, take what you can get, and say "Thank you" a lot!

Creating clear, easy reading for the media

Question from Karen:

Can you offer any feedback on the following release?

Contact: Karen McMaster

(919)542-5757

<mailto:mkarenm@chathamanimalrescue.org>

For Immediate Release

It is with great anticipation and excitement that Chatham Animal Rescue and Education, Inc. (C.A.R.E.) announces its 4th Annual Woof-A-Palooza dog walk to be held on Saturday, September 17th, 2005, from 10 am to 2 pm, on the campus of Central Carolina Community College in Pittsboro, NC. There will be contests, refreshments, demonstrations and activities for you and your pet. Despite the torrential rains of Hurricane Ivan, last year's event raised over \$7,000 that directly benefited the animals in C.A.R.E.'s foster program and provided funding for humane education and outreach to the citizens of Chatham County. We hope that this year's event will be an even bigger success with your help.

To register for the Walk, download an application and pledge form from our website and start collecting pledges for the event. Chatham Animal Rescue and Education, Inc. is a 501 (c)(3) tax-exempt organization. There are prizes for the top pledge collectors, so start collecting now!

If you are a business owner, be a Corporate sponsor. Woof-A-Palooza will provide a fantastic opportunity to advertise your business and, if you choose to be present at the walk, to showcase your company's products and services while helping C.A.R.E. in its mission to protect and place abused, neglected and unwanted animals in Chatham County. There are three levels of

corporate sponsorship available: Gold Sponsorship at \$500, Silver Sponsorship at \$250 and Bronze Sponsorship at \$125. Vendor booths are also available.

This is an important community event. We hope to see you at Woof and are counting on you for your support. Please visit our website www.chathamanimalrescue.org <<http://www.chathamanimalrescue.org>> for additional information. Woof-A-Palooza information and forms are under the Events menu. If you have additional questions, e-mail <mailto:woofapalooza@chathamanimalrescue.org> <<mailto:woofapalooza@chathamanimalrescue.org>>. Thank you for making a difference in the life of an animal. If you do not have access to the Internet, you may leave a message at 919-542-5757.

Chatham Animal Rescue and Education, Inc. is an all-volunteer, not-for-profit humane society. All the animals in the C.A.R.E. system are fostered in volunteer foster homes. C.A.R.E. pays for food and routine medical expenses such as spay or neuter, rabies vaccinations, de-worming and vaccinations. Adoption fees cover the very basic medical expenses of animals, but they do not cover additional treatments that some animals require. Donations, pledges and sponsorships from the walk will be used to help pay the veterinary expense of animals in the C.A.R.E. system.

Financial information about this organization and a copy of its license are available from the State Solicitation Licensing Branch at 919-807-2000. The license is not an endorsement by the State.

Response from Lynne Ouchida:

I think you have all of the basics covered in the body of your release. When I first glanced at the release, it took me awhile to figure out what I was looking at. Is this release going out on a template that has your organizations letterhead on it? If not, you need to clearly identify your organization. I think you can create an appealing title with a walk named Woof-a-Palooza. Do you have a logo for your annual walk or photo from last year that you can attach to the email?

Additional suggestions are typed in bold italics.

Contact: Karen McMaster

(919)542-5757

(is this the best number to reach you? any cell number that you can be reached at their convenience?)

karenm@chathamanimalrescue.org

If email is a good way to contact you, place it in the area of your contact info -

For Immediate Release (insert date)

It is with great anticipation and excitement that Chatham Animal Rescue and Education, Inc. (C.A.R.E.) announces its 4th Annual Woof-A-Palooza dog walk to be held on Saturday, September 17th, 2005, from 10 am to 2 pm, on the campus of Central Carolina Community College in Pittsboro, NC. There will be contests, refreshments, demonstrations and activities for you and your pet. **(You and your pet will have a howling good time as you enjoy the activities, contests, demonstrations and refreshments.)**

Hurricane Ivan could not put a damper on animal supporters as they helped raise over \$7,000 last year. The goal is to raise more money this year to provide critical veterinary care and supplies for the animals in CARE's foster program. The walk also supports CARE's humane education and outreach programs. (what kind of outreach?) Despite the torrential rains of Hurricane Ivan, last year's event raised over \$7,000 that directly benefited the animals in C.A.R.E.'s foster program and provided funding for humane education and outreach to the citizens of Chatham County. We hope that this year's event will be an even bigger success with your help.

(I would delete this paragraph and use the last paragraph to cover it) To register for the Walk, download an application and pledge form from our website and start collecting pledges for the event. Chatham Animal Rescue and Education, Inc. is a 501 (c)(3) tax-exempt organization. **(do you need to state your status or is it known or available on your website?)** There are prizes for the top pledge collectors, so start collecting now!

Woof-A-Palooza corporate sponsorships are available to benefit your business and the animals. Vendor booth space is available to showcase your product or service at this high profile event. (have a sponsorship packet ready to send to anyone that inquires) If you are a business owner, be a Corporate sponsor. Woof-A-Palooza will provide a fantastic opportunity to advertise your business and, if you choose to be present at the walk, to showcase your company's products and services while helping C.A.R.E. in its mission to protect and place abused, neglected and unwanted animals in Chatham County. There are three levels of corporate sponsorship available: Gold Sponsorship at \$500, Silver Sponsorship at \$250 and Bronze Sponsorship at \$125. Vendor booths are also available.

Your participation in Woof-a-Palooza will help save the lives of animals in our community. For a registration and pledge form or for more information visit our website at XXX or call 919 542-5757. This is an important community event. We hope to see you at Woof and are

counting on you for your support. Please visit our website www.chathamanimalrescue.org **(seems too busy- choose one)** <<http://www.chathamanimalrescue.org>> for additional information. Woof-A-Palooza information and forms are under the Events menu. **(most people can navigate to find an event on your website--consider leaving this off)** If you have additional questions, e-mail woofapalooza@chathamanimalrescue.org **(this address should also be accessible on your events page describing the event)** <<mailto:woofapalooza@chathamanimalrescue.org>>. Thank you for making a difference in the life of an animal. If you do not have access to the Internet, you may leave a message at 919-542-5757.

#

The following organizational information can be a tag to your email below your name or is information that you provide if a reporter calls to describe the organization and how the money is used.

Chatham Animal Rescue and Education, Inc. is an all-volunteer, not-for-profit humane society. All the animals in the C.A.R.E. system are fostered in volunteer foster homes. C.A.R.E. pays for food and routine medical expenses such as spay or neuter, rabies vaccinations, de-worming and vaccinations. Adoption fees cover the very basic medical expenses of animals, but they do not cover additional treatments that some animals require. Donations, pledges and sponsorships from the walk will be used to help pay the veterinary expense of animals in the C.A.R.E. system.

Financial information about this organization and a copy of its license are available from the State Solicitation Licensing Branch at 919-807-2000. The license is not an endorsement by the State.

Response from John Van Zante:

Sounds like a terrific event! Good luck. I hope it brings in a lot of money and helps fund your programs.

I'm really big on using headlines that catch the attention of tired, overworked news assignment editors and reporters, not to mention readers. I also firmly believe in making the topic of the release the very first thing that they will read. (In broadcasting we would say not to "bury the lead line").

Please feel free to totally ignore this. You know your local news media far better than anyone else. Here's a suggestion.

For Immediate Release

For more information:

June 21, 2005
Photos available

Karen McMaster
919-542-5757

We're movin' our paws for a worthy cause!

Pittsboro, NC -- Just put one paw in front of the other and you're all set to join the fun at the Woof-A-Palooza dog walk benefiting Chatham Animal Rescue and Education, Inc. (C.A.R.E.). The 4th Annual Woof-A-Palooza will be held on Saturday, September 17th, 2005, from 10 am to 2 pm on the campus of Central Carolina Community College in Pittsboro, NC.

"This year's Woof walk should be even more fun than last year's," says CARE spokesperson Karen McMaster. "But despite all the rain caused by Hurricane Ivan at the 2004 event...not to mention the aroma of all those wet dogs...we still managed to raise more than \$7,000 for CARE's foster program, humane education services, and outreach to the citizens of Chatham County!"

McMaster says that a number of sponsorship opportunities are still available for businesses that want to reach the lucrative community of North Carolina animal lovers. "Woof-A-Palooza provides a fantastic opportunity for businesses to showcase their products and services while helping C.A.R.E. in its mission. Families that participate in Woof are 'lending a helping paw' in our efforts to protect and place abused, neglected and unwanted animals in Chatham County. They support the businesses and companies that join them in supporting CARE." There are three levels of corporate sponsorship available: Gold Sponsorship at \$500, Silver Sponsorship at \$250 and Bronze Sponsorship at \$125. Vendor booths are also available.

Top fund raisers will receive prizes at this year's Woof walk, so now is the time for animal lovers to begin collecting pledges or organizing walking teams made up of family, friends, co-workers, church groups, or civic organizations.

Chatham Animal Rescue and Education, Inc. is an all-volunteer, not-for-profit humane society. Adoption fees cover basic medical expenses, but not any additional treatments that some animals require. Donations, pledges and sponsorships from Woof-A-Palooza will help pay the veterinary expense of animals in the C.A.R.E. system.

Walk applications, pledge forms, and additional information about CARE are available online at www.chathamanimalrescue.org or by calling 919-542-5757.

Making a release exciting and motivating

Question from Verna:

What would you suggest for this release? Thanks!

PRESS RELEASE
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 10, 2005

CONTACT

Verna Boggs

317.788.6330

info@spayneuterservices.com

Low-Cost Spay/Neuter Surgeries in October

Spay-Neuter Services of Indiana (SNSI) is bringing awareness to Pet Overpopulation in October, with a spay/neuter campaign. This annual effort encourages pet owners to take advantage of the reduced surgical fees and spay or neuter their pets. Everyone is eligible and encouraged to help be a part of the solution to end pet overpopulation.

This year, SNSI is joining forces with 21 Central Indiana veterinary clinics to provide the surgeries. Vaccinations need to be current at the time of the surgery and can be provided in conjunction with the surgery at a reduced fee. The lime green certificate that is needed for the program is available at all Marion County Libraries, some surrounding libraries, by request at 317.788.6330, or at SNSI's Web site www.spayneuterservices.org.

Participating vets are located in the following cities: Indianapolis, Anderson, Franklin, Westfield, Danville, Bloomfield, Greenfield, Camby, Sheridan, Greenwood, Avon, Noblesville, and Martinsville.

For more information on this and other programs SNSI sponsors, please visit www.spayneuterservices.org or call 317.788.6330.

Founded in 1977, Spay-Neuter Services of Indiana, Inc. is dedicated to help end pet overpopulation in Indiana by providing affordable options to spay-neuter surgeries. Centrally located in Indianapolis, SNSI consists of volunteers who work on behalf of the many unwanted and neglected animals in this state.

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Spay-Neuter Services of Indiana
P.O. Box 55917
Indianapolis, IN 46205-0917
www.spayneuterservices.org

Response from John Van Zante:

Thanks for submitting this and good luck with your spay / neuter campaign in October! We'll all keep our paws crossed that it's a huge success. I'm more than a little bit envious that you already have a news release ready to go out this far in advance!

The first thing that comes to my mind is, "Where is the call-to-action?" You have terrific information about how people can save money when they have their pets spayed or neutered. Let's also ask them to do it.

My next question is, "Why should I have my pet spayed or neutered?" Even with the discount it's still going to cost me to do this. So, what are the benefits to my pet?

Let's start with the "What, When, Why, Where, and How". And remember that we need to make it easy for the media to tell the story, make them look good (socially responsible) for telling our story, and make the public want to take action as a result of the story.

For Release September 10, 2005
Contact: Verna Boggs
317-788-6330
info@spayneuterservices.com

Save money while you save lives. Low-cost spay/neuter services available during October

In just six years a pair of un-altered dogs can result in 62,000 unwanted puppies and 420,000 orphaned kittens can be the result of two unaltered cats. During "Adopt A Shelter Dog Month" in October, Spay-Neuter Services of Indiana (SNSI) is asking dog and cat owners to save lives and help put a stop to pet overpopulation by having their pets spayed or neutered. As an incentive, pet owners who visit participating Central Indiana veterinarians will pay a reduced fee when they have their pets altered during October.

"Something as simple as a spay or neuter procedure can take a big bite out of the pet overpopulation problem," says SNSI Spokesperson Verna Boggs. "Most experts believe that a spayed or neutered pet will live longer and be less likely to stray. That's a small price to pay for our pets that give back so much in return."

SNSI is "joining paws" with 21 veterinary clinics in Indianapolis, Anderson, Franklin, Westfield, Danville, Bloomfield, Greenfield, Camby, Sheridan, Greenwood, Avon, Noblesville, and Martinsville to provide the low cost procedures.

Boggs reminds pet owners, "Vaccinations need to be current at the time of the surgery or they can be provided in conjunction with the surgery at a reduced fee. The lime green certificate that's necessary for pet owners to take part in the program is available at all Marion County Libraries and some surrounding libraries."

Spay-Neuter Services of Indiana, Inc. is dedicated to helping end pet overpopulation in Indiana by providing affordable options to spay-neuter surgeries. Centrally located in Indianapolis, SNSI consists of volunteers who work on behalf of the many unwanted and neglected animals in this state.

For more information about low cost spay / neuter services during the month of October or to learn how you can help be part of the solution to end pet overpopulation call 317-788-6330 or log on to the SNSI website at www.spayneuterservices.org.

Another thing.....Notice that we're telling the whole story in the first and last paragraphs. A broadcast news writer who has to take our one-page news release and generate 5 versions for use during morning drive can start by taking the first and last paragraphs of this release and give all the basic information. For other versions the writer can mix and match with the information about necessary vaccinations, history of SNSI, why it's important to spay or neuter, and where the service is available. We just made it easy for them to tell our story and they'll look great for their social consciousness!

Response from Lynne Ouchida:

I think you have covered all the basics in your media release. My only suggestions would be to provide something of interest or a fact that people may not know to grab the attention of the media. But, bottom line, you want people to know about this low cost S/N opportunity and you have accomplished that.

Do you have a name for this spay/neuter program? I can hear the chuckles, but the Humane Society of Central Oregon has a month long \$20 cat neuter campaign called "Nip Their Love in the Bud" - (From

Valentines Day to St Patrick's Day) and the name gives the radio and news personalities a lot to laugh and talk about.

Following is what I may do with the addition of some statistic on how many you did last year or over some 'statistically important' period. Is the goal to do more surgeries this year? For some reason I want to read about a goal or motivation other than the standard 'pet overpopulation' plea.

Media Release ("media" now often replaces "Press")

For Immediate Release: September 10, 2005

Contact: Verna Boggs 317.788.6330

info@spayneuter services.com

October Opportunity for Low Cost Spay/Neuter Surgeries

Indianapolis, IN - Spay-Neuter Services of Indiana (SNSI) sponsors the xyz annual spay/neuter campaign to help the numbers of pet overpopulation fall during the month of October. The reduced surgical fees for the spaying or neutering of pets is available to anyone wanting to be a part of the solution to pet overpopulation.

Twenty-one Central Indiana veterinary clinics have partnered with SNSI to provide this low cost opportunity. Vaccinations need to be current and are available at a reduced fee at the time of surgery.

Veterinary clinics in Indianapolis, Anderson, Franklin, Westfield, Danville, Bloomfield, Greenfield, Camby, Sheridan, Greenwood, Avon, Noblesville and Martinsville are participating in this program.

The low cost spay/neuter surgery certificates and information for this program are available at all Marion County Libraries or by calling 317.788.6330 or log on to www.spayneuterservices.org.

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Turning an ordinary event into a media frenzy!

Question from Judy:

Our shelter is located in a small town outside a major US city. An outlet mall in our town is giving us the opportunity to hold a dog adoption event this Friday afternoon in recognition of Take Your Dog to Work

Day. We'll have dogs and puppies available for adoption, a picture board with other available pets at our shelter, info about our feral cat program and our mobile spay/neuter program, items to sell, sign up for new members and volunteers and of course we will accept donations.

The marketing manager at the mall has contacted the local radio station and will have news releases for the local paper. My question is, what kind of spin could we put on this event to get at least one of the network affiliates in the nearby major city to pick up on this event and maybe even bring a film crew? I know we don't have a lot of time but then they're used to working on short notice for stories. We already have a relationship with the FOX affiliate (they let us do a pet of the week) and with the CBS affiliate (we're on their local Saturday morning show once a month). I'm sure the marketing manager from the mall would help us if we could come up with an idea. Any suggestions?

Response from Lynne Ouchida:

It sounds like you have all the elements for making it a successful adoption and educational event for your shelter. Try to honor the reason why a business invited you to hold an event in partnership with them.

The opportunity is National Take Your Dog to Work Day. The focus of this event in general is to allow well-behaved pets to join them in the workplace and to share their companions with co-workers to brighten their day. It is also created to promote adoptions from shelters for those who do not have a dog.

What are you doing to help promote the benefits of companionship to the community? The news needs a story to tell their viewers that is informative, new or provides great footage. If I have an ordinary story but the filming opportunities are great, I might suggest a 'kicker' to close the news. Are they looking for a site for a live remote?

First of all you need to find a good contact to pitch your story. Your strongest pull may be the marketing person for the mall because hopefully they are an important advertising client to one of the stations. Ask the mall's marketing manager if she has a good relationship with one station or person at that station. It is even better if they know someone who is supportive of animal issues or simply loves animals. Has anyone from the news station adopted from your shelter?

You need to think of what images they will be filming. I'm sure they have covered many shelter adoption events, so that is probably pretty stale. Does anyone at the mall already bring their pet to work with them? Is there a story from one of these animals? Or will the mall be joining in the celebration and bringing their pets to work on that day? See if they can get some of the stores and management to bring their dogs to work to exemplify the benefits of having a canine companion as a co-worker or greeter. Are

there folks wanting to adopt from you on that day who work at the mall? Will you be educating store managers on the benefits of animals in the workplace and how to set-up the work/store environment to make it successful? Will employees be bringing dogs to your group to help assess whether or not they would be good co-workers?

Or, work with the media contacts you have established good relationships with and ask anyone for a fresh angle.

Response from John Van Zante:

Congratulations on identifying a terrific media opportunity and taking advantage of it! Since you already have relationships with pet-friendly TV stations...pick up the phone and call them. The News Assignment Editor or morning show guest planner will probably be happy to carry or e-mail your news release to someone in their news room who they know is a pet lover. There are reporters who are covering crashes and war and government corruption that would love to have a break and cover a story about dogs that get to go for a ride in the car and spend the day at work with Mom or Dad.

Does the Marketing Manager at the mall know of any pet friendly businesses that have pets in their stores every day (a mascot or a pet owned by someone who works there)? Will any of the stores in the mall allow staff members to bring their dogs to work on Friday? What I'm getting at here is for you to line up some interview and photo opportunities for the media before they arrive. Make it easy for them. Show them where they can get the best shots, who will be willing to give them an interview, who's sincere, who's funny, who has big dogs, who has small dogs, who has cute dogs, etc. Show them that the mall is "going to the dogs".

Keep in mind that the three things most likely to generate coverage are #1: Kids. #2: Sex. #3: Animals. You're providing the animals. Does the mall have any activities on Friday that will draw children? If so, is there a way to plan a photo opportunity for the media? (Be sure to include the time for this in your news release.) Is there a Victoria's Secret or other similar store that would cooperate to tell reporters how sexy it is to have a pet? (Yep. I know that we're stretching here. But it might make the difference between you taking the dogs back and locking them in a kennel that night or sending them "home" to their new couch and kids and food dish.)

One more thing...Don't wait until Friday! Part of our purpose for this is to encourage people to actually bring their dogs to work that day. If they don't find out about it until they watch the news on Friday night or read the paper on Saturday, we missed it. Pass along some tips that the media can use in-advance for people who want to take part in Take Your Dog to Work Day. For Example....

Check with the management to make sure it's alright if you bring your dog. If the boss says it's okay, check with the people who work near you to make sure that none of them is allergic or have a fear of dogs."

Here are some tips for a successful "Take Your Dog to Work" Day.

- Bring items from home that will comfort your dog (bed, water and food bowls, treats, favorite toy, etc.)
- Schedule time in the day to take your dog for walk breaks
- Make sure your dog isn't overcome by too many people petting it at once
- Plan an outdoor, playtime, lunch break
- Bring "poop bags" and pick up after your dog
- Reassure your dog throughout the day that everything is fine and it will be going home with you after work.

Just one more thing. (Didn't I already say that?) If you're e-mailing your release to the media, you might attach a photo of a dog sitting behind a desk or by a computer, a graphic of a dog wearing a tie, or even a photo of your own dog napping on your office floor. If it's cute and they like it, the e-mail will get passed around and you might be more likely to find someone who wants to cover the story.

How to win friends and influence media...

Question from Ann:

This must be a common problem; WE find our stories compelling, interesting and relevant. BUT, the news media either ignores our news submissions or, 1) reduces the information to "just the facts" or 2) rewrites the information so it sounds like a 3rd grader wrote it.

What is the best way to "break into" the news? Is there a way to determine what the media will accept? And is there a resource for stock press release format templates for us to use?

Response from Lynne Ouchida:

You are absolutely correct that this is a common problem for most organizations in the beginning. With some networking, relationship building and a lot of thank yous it can be overcome.

If you go back to Best Friends forum archives, I think you will find that your question has been addressed in the marketing and media section. There is also a great archive available on the website at www.bestfriends.org/nomorehomelesspets/pdf/mediarelationsclifton.pdf from when Merritt Clifton of Animal People was a forum guest.

From your question, I would ask you to review what you send and see if you are providing the information that they want and need, and if it's in a format that makes it easy for them. A reduction to 'just the facts' is what reporters do. If they are re-writing the information into something that seems incorrect, though, then maybe they misunderstood your message.

Review the newspapers, TV and radio stations - what group IS getting their message out? Do you know anyone within that organization that may be willing to assist you in your endeavors? You may be surprised at the assistance people are willing to provide. Is there a non-profit group to join to increase your contacts? Can you partner with a business that is a big advertiser in your community?

It is difficult to give specifics without knowing more about what type of organization you represent and the community you live in. I believe that the fundamentals of building good relationships with your media representatives is critical in whatever size of city you are in and whatever group you represent.

Working within a small town can be difficult if you are new to the area. You need to get out and meet people. If your organization is new, make sure you recruit a strong board or have employees/volunteers with good ties to the community, especially someone who has worked with the media and has good contacts. Make sure that your organization always represents itself professionally and with integrity.

Take advantage of every opportunity to tell the media how wonderful they are in getting the news out to the community. Support their events as well. If a radio or TV station is doing a heartfelt fundraiser, I make sure that I contribute to their cause in person. Invite a media person to be a 'celebrity' judge or guest at one of your events. Write a personal invitation to an event or provide complimentary tickets to an event they would enjoy. And always follow-up with a sincere thank-you.

So, why am I telling you things you've heard and read before? Because the foundation of getting your story out is having good relationships with a variety of media representatives and/or owners of the company. Once you have a good working relationship, whatever you send with your name or organization attached will be reviewed and evaluated on its value to them and their specific audience.

It helps to have continuity in your media releases. If you have different people writing them, the recipients may prefer one style over another and if it becomes a difficult filtering process for them, they will choose the easy solution: ignore the information and move on to the next.

Most media outlets have a website that provides their preferred format for receiving information. But remember, thousands of other people are using that method as well. I send my releases to the general

email address or fax number, as well as to a few personal contacts within that organization. When the editor meets with the reporters for assignments or input, it always helps to have someone campaign your story where it counts. Again, personal contacts and mutual respect are the key. If it is a truly important, don't forget to follow-up with a quick phone call.

Once you build your media contact list, don't forget to maintain it. There is a lot of movement in the industry and you need to keep current.

A simple look into your software programs may provide a media release template or scan some websites for some examples. Choose a style and make it yours. Remember to have key information at the top and easy to read:

- The name, address, phone and website address of your organization
- Release Date
- Contact information- numbers that allow them to reach someone immediately
- A Title that succinctly describes the information

The first and last paragraphs should tell everything with the middle paragraphs providing additional information or a quote.

Hope this helps or supports what you have heard before. Don't get discouraged, just try to attack it with a fresh mind and new angle. Remember to ask for help from people who are doing it well in your community.

Response from John Van Zante:

These are common problems for all of us. Thank you for giving us great opportunity to talk about what it's like to be the person receiving our news releases.

First we need to determine "compelling, interesting, and relevant:" for who? We work with animals every day. One of my pets is sleeping on my office floor while I'm writing this. We're dedicating a large portion of our lives to saving them from euthanasia, ending the problem of pet overpopulation, finding homes for orphaned pets, and matching the needs of these pets with the desires of the adopting families. That's what WE do.

The reporter, writer, camera operator, or news assignment editor has a very limited amount of time or space to fill with something that they believe will appeal to the needs, wants, desires, or curiosities of their readers, viewers, listeners, or subscribers. That's what THEY do. They're trying to reach people who are raising kids and paying bills and fighting traffic and trying to make their marriage happy and keeping their

bosses off their backs. And the news media wants to look good for doing this. If we want them to use our stories we need to help them look good and make it easy for them. That's it in a nutshell.

So when (or before) kitten season hits we KNOW how important it is to talk about spay/neuter. But how does that help the media to look good? What information, photos, quotes, or interview opportunities can we provide to them that will make the public say, "I need to get my cat spayed," or "Those guys at Channel 8 really care about animals," or "I should donate to that shelter because of all the good work they do."

Because it's compelling to us doesn't mean it's compelling to them. And they have three sentences on the radio, or 25 seconds (including sound bite) on television, or one column by two inches in the newspaper to say everything that we want them to say. That's why they reduce it to "just the facts". That's all they have time or space for. So we need to provide them with news releases that are written in such a way that they can take our first paragraph (that gives the basic information of the story) and our last paragraph (that tells how to learn more) and provide the public with the information they need and how to take action. That's what the media does. We're not going to change that.

Your question about making it sound like a 3rd grader wrote the story is close...but no cigar. A rule of thumb (or...in our case...a rule of dew claw) for writers and reporters is that the news should be written and delivered in such a manner that it can be understood by an average 12-year-old (6th or 7th grader). If we can put our releases in this form it's less likely that some poor, overworked writer or reporter will have to take the time to "dumb it down" before they use it. Remember, the more time it takes them to use our release, the less likely they are to use our stuff in the future. Let's make it easier for them to tell our stories.

One more thing on this subject. I find it helpful to learn which media people are pet lovers. If they have pets of their own they are sometimes more likely to cover animal related stories. Ask them if it's okay to send news releases directly to them. You know how we are. We don't just want **our** pets to be happy and healthy. We want them **all** to be that way! But don't flood them with every little thing. Make sure that it will be worth their while to read what you're sending.

As for breaking into the news, you might want to refer to <http://www.bestfriends.com/archives/forums/press.html>. This is one of the archives in the forum Marketing & Media section featuring Merritt Clifton. Merritt and Kim from "Animal People" do a terrific job and he provides a lot of great tips.

I hope that helps!

Paring down a press release

Question from Mickey:

This is a press release our brand-new cat adoption agency wrote for a local newspaper in the town where I live. We've tried to personalize the news that we're beginning a new adoption agency by using the local slant. Any help is appreciated:

Tomball, Texas (June, 2005)

The Board of Directors for a new cat adoption agency, Happy Cat Adoptions, covering all of metropolitan Houston, includes local Pinehurst resident, Mickey Platko.

"People wonder why we need another cat adoption agency when there are so many available, but the number of homeless cats far outstrips the number of spaces in shelters or agencies. We are desperately needed."

Many of the cats available for adoption through the agency come from the Tomball/Pinehurst area. "I belong to the Tomball SOS (Save Our Strays), a group of people who trap, spay or neuter, release, and maintain the stray cat population in Tomball. If there are kittens or friendly cats who show up at the sites, we find a home for that cat. Since I'm in this area, the cats I foster come from Tomball or Pinehurst."

Happy Cat Adoption Agency provides basic medical care for their cats before adoption. "For instance," Platko explains, "we spay or neuter all of our cats, test them for two major feline diseases, de-worm them, and give them age-appropriate vaccinations. We also microchip them."

Microchipping is a process whereby a miniscule computer chip with the owner's contact information on it, is implanted under the cat's skin.

The new agency focuses on matching a cat to a household. "We're not interested in placing a cat just to get them out of the program. We don't have a physical shelter—our cats are housed in foster homes. That gives us the opportunity to see how a particular cat reacts to the home environment—do they get along with cats, dogs, children? Do they like to sit in a sunny window all day or do they want to play, play play? Are they cuddly lap cats, or are they more independent?"

“When we do place,” Platko said, “we make sure the adopting household is a good fit. We want the cat to be happy, and we want the adopter to be very happy when the day is done.”

Platko, who has been involved in cat rescue for about ten years, said the pet overpopulation problem has definitely hit this area. “Every night, members of the Tomball SOS go around town, feeding the more than 40 cats on the route. These people pay for spay and neuter and for food out of their own pockets, with some help from a local feral cat assistance program. They are taking action on the problem right here in this area. And they’re a drop in the bucket.”

Adoption agencies, like Happy Cat Adoptions, help by providing exposure to potential adopters for the cats rescued from the streets. “We don’t take owner-relinquished animals,” Platko explains. “We only take cats when people are willing to foster and pay for basic medical expenses.”

She said people sometimes question the fees that local adoption agencies like Happy Cat charge an adoption fee for the rescued cats in their care. “For all the medical work that’s been done, the fees are a bargain. There is no such thing as a free kitten. A responsible pet owner spays or neuters the kitten, gets current vaccinations, and tests for diseases and for parasites. The costs are well over what the most expensive adoption agency charges.”

What about adopting one of the free kittens available in local shopping parking lots during the summer?

“When I see ‘Free Kitten’ signs, I want to cry,” Platko said. “It’s never good to market a living being to someone who’s coming out of a store and picking up an animal on impulse, or because the kids cry. An adoption should be something you consider. So many of those free kittens or puppies end up back on the streets, or they repopulate, or they end up in research labs or dog fighting rings or as snake food. If only people who find themselves with a litter of kittens knew that, with only a little more trouble on their part, they could guarantee that wouldn’t happen.”

Platko said that many adoption agencies do pay all medical fees for animals accepted into the programs, and that some can even help to foster. “We’re new, so we can’t finance medical costs. Each of our fosters earns a gold star—they pay the fees for their own rescued cats, and they place the cats for adoption through our agency.”

Adoptable cats available from Happy Cat Adoptions can be seen at <http://happycat.petfinder.org>.

Response from John Van Zante:

Sounds like you have exciting things going on! Congratulations and good luck with Happy Cat Adoptions!

My first suggestion is that we limit your release to one topic and cut it back to one page. Multi-page, multi-topic releases end up in the recycle bin because overworked writers don't have the time to determine how to tell our story. Let's give them the main point in a way that they can use. If we do a good job on this, they'll be more receptive to our future releases that explain the other things we're doing.

Let's call them "News" or "Media" releases. Some electronic media (Radio, TV, Internet) is offended by the term "Press". We don't want to take chances on this.

Putting a specific date on the release, rather than just the month, adds a sense of urgency.

We also want to make sure they have a contact person and phone number for the media to follow up.

We'll need a headline to get attention:

"Help on the way for overcrowded animal shelters. Happy Cat Adoptions to find families for orphaned cats."

Next, we'll start the release with specific information about our topic... the beginning of Happy Cat. We'll want two or three sentences in the first paragraph to give the basic information for the whole news release.

"There are more homeless cats in the Houston metropolitan area than there are spaces available at animal shelters. Help is on the way now that the newly created Happy Cat Adoptions agency is working to capture stray cats, tend to their medical needs, and place them with their new families in loving, lifelong homes. Each cat available through Happy Cat Adoptions will be spayed or neutered, up-to-date on vaccinations, and micro-chipped for identification before being placed in the new home that fits its needs and temperament."

In the middle of the release we'll give some brief quotes that print reporters can use to help make the story fit the available space or the electronic media can use to create different versions of the story.

We'll be cutting out a lot of the details here. If the goal of this release is to announce the creation of Happy Cat, we don't want it to get lost in the details about how a microchip works, other organizations, or kittens being given away in a parking lot. Let's don't talk about them. Let's talk about Happy Cat!

And we'll close it out by telling the public how to get more information.

"Meet cats available for adoption by logging on to happycat@petfinder.org. For more information about how to become a volunteer or ways to support Happy Cat Adoption call 713-385-1798."

Now, let's put it all together:

For Immediate Release: June 24, 2005

For more information: Mickey Platko 713-385-1798

"Help on the way for overcrowded animal shelters. Happy Cat Adoptions to find families for orphaned cats."

Houston, TX -- There are more homeless cats in the Houston metropolitan area than there are spaces available at animal shelters. Help is on the way now that the newly created Happy Cat Adoptions agency is working to capture stray cats, tend to their medical needs, and place them in loving, lifelong homes. Each cat available through Happy Cat Adoptions will be spayed or neutered, up-to-date on vaccinations, and micro-chipped for identification before being placed in the new home that fits its needs and temperament.

"People wonder why we need another cat adoption agency when there are so many available," says Happy Cat Board President Mickey Platko. "But the number of homeless cats far outstrips the number of spaces in shelters or agencies. We are desperately needed."

Platko explains that many of the cats available for adoption through Happy Cat come from the Tomball/Pinehurst area where a rescue group called SOS (Save Our Strays) is helping to control the stray cat population by trapping and altering strays before they are released back into the community. "Happy Cat will work with them to provide basic medical care for these cats, spay or neuter, and test them for feline diseases before making them available for adoption."

"The mission of Happy Cat is to match each cat with an appropriate household. We want to see how each cat reacts to the home environment. Do they get along with cats, dogs, and children? Do they like to sit in a sunny window all day or do they want to play, play play? Are they cuddly lap cats, or are they more independent?"

Meet cats available for adoption by logging on to happycat@petfinder.org. For more information about how to become a volunteer or ways to support Happy Cat Adoption call 713-385-1798.

Response from Lynne Ouchida:

It sounds like Happy Cat Adoptions is off to an exciting start. What I would suggest you do with your introductory media release is to decide what is the single most important message you are trying to get out. Make it short, informative and enticing. People love to hear about groups working cooperatively for a common goal. When it comes to animal welfare, that usually translates into saved tax dollars.

The media release utilized an important element of providing a quote. There is nothing more rewarding than to see your story in print and a beautiful 'pull-quote' staring back at you. So, to get that important message out, utilize one or two quotes that tells the message or something intriguing. I found about 5 quotes in the release; some of those could have been your talking points when a reporter responded to your release and called for more exciting details.

The community in which I work is relatively small, but the reporters have the same time constraints as the big cities. My philosophy is repeated several times this week - make it easy for the media to use your release by providing them the information in a format they prefer and make yourself accessible to them. If you don't know the format they want, call, introduce yourself and organization and politely ask. Don't forget the all important thank you - even if it is 'just' the receptionist. You will be amazed at how important ANY contact can be.

First of all, I have to say, writing a media release takes time. I rarely create one in just a few minutes, and I never send it without reading it multiple times myself, then I often have one or two other people read it to make sure the message is clearly written and the tone is just right. There are times I am writing a release because irresponsible pet owners have not done something that is affecting the lives of animals in our shelter or community. Put a check on yourself and have other people read it for the tone. Be objective and never present yourself as angry or bitter, or taking pity upon yourself.

Now, what would I do with this exciting information? I would start by trying to introduce the organization to the media and community.

For Immediate Release: June 24, 2005

For More Information: Mickey Plantko 713.385.1798

Happy Cat Adoptions Assist Local Shelters in Finding Homes for Homeless Cats

Houston, TX - Metropolitan Houston animal shelters and homeless cats have a new ally in Happy Cat Adoptions agency to care for and find homes for our feline friends in need. Happy Cat Adoptions agency provides adoption services that matches you with a cat that fits your lifestyle and all adoptions include the spay or neuter surgery, vaccinations and microchip identification.

"People wonder why we need another cat adoption agency when there are so many available," says Happy Cat Adoptions board member Mickey Platko. "But the number of homeless cats far outstrips the number of spaces in shelters or agencies. We are desperately needed."

Finding your new best friend becomes easy at Happy Cat Adoptions agency. The rescue organization utilizes foster homes which truly get to know the personality and needs of their feline friends. If you are looking for the playful and adventurous or couch potato lap cat, Happy Cat Adoptions can find your match.

To see cats looking for new loving home log on to www.happycat.petfinder.org. For more information or to find out how you can help Happy Cat Adoption call Mickey Platko at 713.385.1798.

Headlines and a sense of urgency are key

Question from Amy:

I am submitting the press release below to be edited. Any suggestions are welcome. Thank you for providing this forum!

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT:

Amy Cox

Missouri Alliance for Animal Legislation

877/444-6225 PHONE

913/709-9438 MOBILE

mail@maal.org

www.maal.org

Constituent Lobbyists for Animal Welfare to Learn the Ropes

St. Louis, MO – August 3, 2005 – The Missouri Alliance for Animal Legislation will be holding a Lobbying at the State Level 101 Workshop to educate the public on the topic of lobbying for animal welfare as a constituent. The workshop will be held Wednesday, August 10 at Talayna's restaurant, 310 Debaliviere, in St. Louis.

The workshop is free and will include information on how legislation is enacted at the state level, how to find out who your state legislators are, best practices for contacting your legislators, and how to stay well informed on animal welfare legislation in Missouri.

"Many individuals have an interest in legislation but are unsure of how to get involved. This workshop is aimed at taking the mystery out of how legislation is passed or defeated in Jefferson City, and how each citizen can play a role," said Nancy Grove, Alliance board president.

Workshop attendees will hear a presentation and have an opportunity to address questions to state legislators, attending as special guests. Those that come with an appetite will be able to enjoy dinner during the presentation, with a portion of the proceeds going to the Alliance's efforts to enact quality animal welfare legislation in Jefferson City.

The Missouri Alliance for Animal Legislation has been in existence since 1990 as the only full-time group lobbying on behalf of animal welfare legislation in Jefferson City. *Animal welfare is defined by the American Veterinary Medical Association as a human responsibility that encompasses all aspects of animal well-being, including proper housing, management, nutrition, disease prevention and treatment, responsible care, humane handling, and when necessary, humane euthanasia.*

For more information on the August 10 Lobbying at the State Level 101 Workshop, or general information about the Missouri Alliance for Animal Legislation, please call toll-free, at 877/444-6225 or visit us on the web at www.maal.org.

Response from John Van Zante:

In the past few years I've been fortunate to meet several animal welfare people from Missouri. As a former Missouri resident I know that there are some big obstacles to overcome because of all the breeders in the state. Good luck with your efforts to continue educating the public on how they can help! (Or, as we Californians would say....You Rock!)

If you've seen any of the other letters that Lynne Ouchida and I have responded to this week, there are a few things that we try to do consistently. Let's start with those.

When you say "For Immediate Release", remember to include the date. I know you have it at the beginning of the release, but the news editors will be looking at the top of the page. This can add a sense of urgency.

Great job with all your contact information. When I was a news reporter one of the biggest frustrations was trying to follow up on a news release and not being able to get in touch with anyone. (Make their job easy.)

While the headline is accurate, let's make it a little more interesting for the person sitting in the newsroom opening 100 envelopes and wading through a pile of faxes. Let's grab their attention with,

"Become a voice for those who cannot speak!"

I'm very, very big on including an attention grabbing lead line for the release. We need to make sure that the first words of the first sentence give the main topic or provide a tease that makes the news editor want to read the rest of the release. With this release I see the call-to-action as the most important information, with the name of the organization and the location of the event being secondary.

"Learn how you can be a voice for those who cannot speak. Attend a workshop entitled 'Lobbying at the State Level - 101' on Wednesday, August 10 at Talayna's restaurant, 310 Debaliviere, in St. Louis. The free workshop sponsored by the Missouri Alliance for Animal Legislation will explain how legislation is enacted at the state level, how to find out who your state legislators are, best practices for contacting your legislators, and how to stay well informed on animal welfare legislation in Missouri."

Now that the first paragraph has given news writers the nuts and bolts, let's drop down to the last paragraph and give them a short to close the story (in case this is all the time or space they have available).

"For more information about the workshop or the Missouri Alliance for Animal Legislation call 877-444-6225 or log on to www.maal.org."

In the middle, we'll give some short quote and explain some of the specifics. But be sure to stick to the main point of this release, which is the workshops. The media is generally more receptive to a shorter release. And if we stray from our point we risk the chance that they'll go off in a different direction and miss the point we want them to make.

I can't impress enough how important it is to give the media a headline that will catch their attention and a complete story that they can report simply by using the first and last paragraphs of our news releases. Let's make it as easy as we possibly can for them to tell our stories.

One other thing. You know your local news media far better than I ever will. Build your relationships with them and ask them what you can be doing to make their jobs easier and help them to look good for telling your stories. If we can do this we'll increase our chances of getting coverage for the animals and people we serve.

Now.....here's a sample release:

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: August 3, 2005
CONTACT: Amy Cox - Missouri Alliance for Animal Legislation
877/444-6225 PHONE / 913/709-9438 MOBILE

Become a voice for those who cannot speak!

St. Louis, MO - Learn how you can be a voice for those who cannot speak. Attend a workshop entitled 'Lobbying at the State Level - 101' on Wednesday, August 10 at Talayna's restaurant, 310 Debaliviere, in St. Louis. The free workshop sponsored by the Missouri Alliance for Animal Legislation will explain how legislation is enacted at the state level, how to find out who your state legislators are, best practices for contacting your legislators, and how to stay well informed on animal welfare legislation in Missouri.

"This workshop will teach the public effective ways of lobbying for animal welfare", says Alliance board President Nancy Grove. "Many people are interested in legislation, but don't know how to get involved. This workshop will take the mystery out of how legislation is passed or defeated in Jefferson City, and how each citizen can play a role."

Workshop attendees will have an opportunity to address questions to state legislators. Dinner will be available during the presentation with a portion of the proceeds going to the Missouri Alliance for Animal Legislation.

The Missouri Alliance for Animal Legislation was founded in 1990 as the only full-time group lobbying on behalf of animal welfare legislation in Jefferson City. For more information about the workshop or the Missouri Alliance for Animal Legislation call 877-444-6225 or log on to www.maal.org.

Response from Lynne Ouchida:

It looks like you are doing a great job of putting the basic elements of a media release together. This is a very important subject that effects animal welfare across the nation. What happens in your state legislatively for animals sets the pace for other states. Try to make the release inviting to everyone at all levels of the political spectrum. Some of your most important allies will be those who simply love animals but have no understanding of the political process. Keep words inviting and simple. My only suggestions would be as follows.

At the top of your release, get some of the basics down in a format that is easy to read.

- **Identify your organization clearly at the top:** a letterhead type template or at least provide organization name, address, phone & website
- **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Wednesday, August 3, 2005** (A tip given to me by a reporter was they appreciate the day of the week - it makes it easier for them, therefore I state the day of the week as well as the date.)
- **Contact or for more information:** Amy Cox 877 444-6225 or cell 913 709-9438 (numbers & email address after or below name)
- **Title** make it boldly stand out to peak their interest with all caps or larger font

Animal Welfare Constituents Learn How to Influence Legislation

The use of city and state is dependant upon who your audience is. I used to put city and state, then was kindly told by a few local media contacts that they know who we are and what city and state the organization is from. I do add city and state if the media release is going outside of the area.

ST. Louis, MO - Learn how to be a voice for the animals at the Lobbying at the State Level 101 Workshop on Wednesday, August 10 at Talayna's restaurant, 310 Debaliviere, in St. Louis. The Missouri Alliance for Animal Legislation is sponsoring this free workshop to encourage people to take part in the legislative process.

"Many individuals have an interest in legislation but are unsure of how to get involved." says Nancy Grove, Missouri Alliance board president. "This workshop is aimed at taking the mystery out of how legislation is passed or defeated in Jefferson City, and how each citizen can play a role."

Workshop attendees will learn how to find out who their legislators are, how to contact them and how to follow a legislative act through the state process. Special guests include state legislators (try to include significant names) who will answer your questions.

A dinner that benefits the Alliance's efforts to enact quality animal welfare legislation will be offered to attendees.

For more information on the workshop or the Missouri Alliance for Animal Legislation call toll-free 877 444-6225 or visit www.maal.org.

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The information about your organization can be a tag-line to your email name and contact information.

Member Comments

Comment from Crystal:

I made this flyer kinda thing for Take Your Dog to Work Day, posted at http://aces.tabulas.com/zoodacrys/media/25761_SPCA_event.doc

Feel free to chop it up however you like, there's no copyright on it or anything. I just thought it might be a good jumping-off place. Have fun with it!

Comment from Jaice:

I just wanted to share with everyone to hang in there and don't let it bother you if the releases you send seem to go into a big, black hole. Our group has sent regular releases to local media for the past couple of years, with little to no response. Not even a, "Drop dead, get lost." All of the sudden, in the past few months we've been the media's darling. We've appeared in TV and radio broadcasts, as well as in a local magazine, trade journal and several papers.

I was talking with one columnist and she let on that she'd been keeping tabs on our organization all along and had been reading our releases with interest...even though she never mentioned us until this year-- now we've made it into her weekly column THREE times!

Where I live, there are a LOT of animal groups. Many of them close up shop before they ever really get off the ground. Many more do less than they'd planned, and less than they had said they would. Others are so fractious that their board members change all the time.

The media staff may really care about animal issues, but they know that they have limited time and space to give to animal stories (which have to be rotated with news about politics, schools, religion, other social

causes, etc, etc). They may not want to 'waste' that precious slot on a fly-by-night or Johnny-come-lately start-up. We sometimes need to prove ourselves with consistently intriguing releases that talk about real progress and impart professionalism. Only then will we get the coverage we 'deserve.'

Comment from Patty:

I noticed that this week's example press releases often included at least one quote from the very same person who submitted the release. One little trick that's worked well for us is to include quotes from someone OTHER than the submitter. Even more preferable is to also have a quote from a recipient or from a 'regular' person in the community who's not an 'animal freak.'

This seems to get the interest of the media because it doesn't sound so much like we're running a one-person operation. It also provides them with more than one perspective, and sort of gives them a 'preview' of community response to the release. In other words, we hope they'll think, "Well, if Joe Normal thinks this is important and said so in a quote, then maybe other members of our audience will like it, too."

True confessions: I suspect we're not alone in this, but the person writing the release often makes up quotes for other folks to say, then asks the 'quoted' person for approval before submitting. Certain volunteers have even given us carte blanche; they'll 'say anything' for the animals that we want them to, and they don't even care if we run it by them or not. This allows us to say what we want without it looking like it all came from one person.

I encourage anyone to be brave when asking for a quote: maybe the mayor, the head of animal control, or a local celebrity would be willing to go along with a quote you author for them!

Comment from Laurel:

I've always tried to find the right "hook" for a news release, something that demonstrates to the media either "news" or good "human interest" potential. I also supply a media packet with additional information, resource information: statistics, background info, a bio on specific dogs or people they might want to feature, etc that could be useful to them.

My theory is the short news release hooks them, the packet supplies info they could use if they decided to cover the story. Make it as easy as possible for them while banking on the fact that Saturdays and Sundays are slow news days and if City Hall doesn't burn down, we have a chance at some coverage.

Closing comments from forum moderator:

Thank you to the many members who sent in questions and comments for this week's forum! We didn't get to every release or question that was submitted; hopefully we all learned some good tips from the examples that were posted.

Transcripts from this and all other forum weeks, including an entire section on Marketing & Media, are archived for easy reference, and are made available to all at <http://www.bestfriends.com/nomorehomelesspets/weeklyforum/forumarchives.cfm>. Meanwhile, those of you who joined the forum midweek can view the complete transcripts right away at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/NMHP/>.

Frequently, members contact us asking for permission to share the information posted through this forum. **The answer is always yes.** We just ask that the source is acknowledged (No More Homeless Pets online forum, hosted by Best Friends Animal Society) and that the web page for the forum is provided (<http://www.bestfriends.com/nomorehomelesspets/weeklyforum/>). That way they know where to go to find out more!

As always, thank you for being part of the forum, and for everything you do for the animals!

Nuts and Bolts and Do's and Don'ts

Question from Nozomi:

Release how-to's I've read in the past have advised us to NOT send unsolicited items to the media via an email attachment. But, is it okay if one is including a photo? I'm confused!

Also, is there any particular font style or size, indenting style, etc that's important? I notice that the 'FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE' part is usually in all capital letters--is that a standard? I want our releases to look professional and I'm afraid if they're not right, then the folks who receive them will just laugh and throw them away! Please give us any tips and secrets as to spacing, etc.

Response from Lynne Ouchida:

This question stirred-up in me that old nagging sense of insecurity and sense of incompetence. Why did I react this way? Because how I do things is not something I specifically learned in school, nor from a course or book.

I believe that doing a fine job of creating media releases for your organization is something that develops from good, old fashioned networking as well as learning from good and bad experiences. When I don't know the answer or am at a loss for anything, I pick-up the phone and call someone who can lend an ear

and hopefully point me in the right direction. Yes, I said phone. Making contact by phone or in person does have meaning in today's electronic society. Don't consume too much of their time, but a quick hello goes a long way in maintaining important contacts.

The one thing that I absolutely love about animal welfare is the fact that people are willing to share their knowledge and expertise because we are all working towards the same goals. This is what inspired me to dedicate nearly 15 years of my life to animal welfare. I certainly have role models that motivate me to have the same impact on people, animals and legislation that they do. I let them know it and strove to develop relationships with them that enable me to use them as valuable resources. Even after a decade I continue to send a friendly note of congratulations if I hear they've done something wonderful and even a condolence card or donation in memory of if they've lost a special companion.

In your journey to help the animals you will meet people at conferences, meetings and on-line forums who can help you achieve your goals. You also meet these people while standing in a grocery line, at a community event or in your organizations lobby or hallways. If you live in a small town or have a high profile position, remember, regardless of the fact that it is your day off, in most people's mind you are so and so of such and such group. Always be friendly and professional.

So, back to your question and my reaction. The opportunity to be a guest on Best Friends No More Homeless Pets Forum gave me the opportunity to meet and learn from John Van Zante. Our conversations have been solely via email, but again, along the path of animal welfare I have met someone who I feel shares my passion for animal welfare and is willing to share his expertise. I had to tell him that I felt that based upon his experience he is the one best to answer this question.

I know what I do today is a result of many years of developing personal contacts with media representatives and that the format I send out is a template that resulted from learning from experiences and from direct feedback from those receiving my releases. I did not know of a black and white format that was ideal. The response to this question from John says it all.

Earlier I commented on where one can find a template for a release. Look in your software programs or find an example from a website. Take an example that fulfills the requirements of being easy for an editor, reporter or writer to quickly assess the information and use it.

Know the timelines that your newspapers, television and radio work from. Know the deadlines for your monthly and weekly papers if you want it to be posted in their paper. Broadcast TV and radio are much more immediate.

John addressed the basics of format, font, spacing and length so I won't be redundant.

In regards to attachments, again, know your sources and what they will accept. Do not send them unless you know your recipient.

Make observations in the local business or other weekly papers. Does your local news utilize logos or photos when broadcasting a story? Are they using submitted photos? If they are, inquire about the requirements. Make sure your photos are of professional quality. If you are not a good photographer or you do not have decent equipment, recruit a local photographer. Amateur photo will not send the professional image you want to present. Never send a huge photo file as an attachment. Make the photo less than 500 KB. If they want a higher resolution photo, they can request it. You can also note that photos are available upon request.

I have one interesting comment to pass on. One of my main contacts in the media commented that he quite often gets releases that are so short and/or incomplete they don't tell the whole story. Don't forget the basic who, what, where, when, why and how to get more information. He says sometimes they sound interesting but the source of information was so questionable that it was not worth the time and effort to call for details. He would have printed something if there was complete information to copy and paste.

Thank you for this experience and the reminder that it takes a lot of work to get your organization's message out. To all of you who are making the effort to learn more by utilizing Best Friends, No More Homeless Pets forum: keep up the good work to promote your organization.

Response from John Van Zante:

As much as I would like to tell you that the world of animal shelter public relations is highly complex and that the reason why shelters including Helen Woodward Animal Center (HWAC) are so successful is because they have totally amazing PR Managers, the fact of the matter is that "This ain't rocket science".

This week Lynne Ouchida and I have shared a lot of ideas and information about the things we do to generate publicity and news coverage for our shelters in San Diego, CA and Bend, OR. I'll have to guess that our counterparts at Best Friends and No More Homeless Pets believe that Lynne and I do at least adequate jobs in our communities or they would not have invited us to take part in this forum. I think I can speak for us both and say that we're humbled to even be asked.

On to your questions.

I would make the photo an attachment. If print media wants to cut and paste your text, a photo in the text will mess it up. Okay, let me back up. When I send a news release with a photo via e-mail:

Catchy subject line that will encourage them to open the message

A note at the top of the page indicating something like, "This is a touching story with lots of great photo opportunities of kids and animals. I hope you can cover it. JVZ"

I paste the actual text below that on the page.

I attach a Word file of the release.

I attach the photo file.

Yep, I know this is overkill. But if a reporter is not able to open Word files, they can still read my release.

Most media people really don't really care about what's capitalized or underlined or in bold letters. I believe that consistency is more important. In the news releases that we issue to the media I follow the same format all the time because it's easy for them to read and it's a no-brainer for them to look at it and see that it came from HWAC. They have learned that my releases are easy for them to turn into an on-air story or print item.

I sometimes underline or use bold print to bring attention to the things that are most important. This will usually include the first and last paragraphs where I make my main points and tell the public how to get more information. As for the people who are receiving the releases (sorry if this is becoming repetitious) they want it easy and they want to look good for telling the story.

I don't send a blanket e-mail to people I don't know. But after I've begun to establish relationships with them I ask if they would prefer e-mail. Most of the TV and radio people want e-mail so they get the info ASAP. They have e-mail to their news assignment desks specifically for this purpose. Some print media want e-mail so they can cut and paste. Others want fax because their chain of command in the newsroom works better that way. There is one old reporter here in San Diego who has never read an e-mail in his life and believes that the fax machine may spell the decline of civilization. We only work with him a couple times per year....but when we do he gets hard copies via snail mail. And it's worth the time and effort and expense because he does a terrific job! We give it to him the way he wants it.

We haven't had a specific question about it this week, but I very seldom make follow up phone calls to the media after sending a news release. When I was working as a news director, I HATED getting calls from PR people. I had already made up my mind whether or not I was going to cover a story. Them wasting my time to call and ask about it never once changed my mind about running a story that was boring, too involved, or just didn't have any interest for my listeners. Along that same line, a three-page news release never made their story more interesting. It just meant that nobody in my newsroom had time to read it. Their story was dead before we even read the headline.

Another thing that we haven't touched on this week is the matter of directing your message to a target audience. Who is it that you want to reach with your story? As an example, let's talk about pet adoptions. Who is the most likely person in the family of mom and dad and their 2.3 children to make the final decision and be ultimately responsible for the long term care of Fido or Fluffy? It's going to be that 25 to 49 year old female affectionately known as "Mom". Mom will read the paper or pick up a magazine when time allows. She will watch television after the kids are off to bed for the night. And she will most definitely listen to her radio.

Let's break it down a little bit more. When 37 year old Mrs. Jones is on her way to drop the kids off at school or day care, she's not listening to an Alternative Rock radio station. Her dial is probably tuned to light rock, country, or talk. And she is a captive audience who has chosen to listen to what is being said.

This does not mean that we ignore the other radio stations. But we can target specific radio stations, newspapers, magazines, and TV stations with animals, programs, services, and activities that are most likely to fit their lifestyles and meet their needs. Another example: A few years ago we had a dog in our kennels who suffered seizures. As long as he received his medication on schedule, he was fine. But the lack of understanding of his condition resulted in a long stay here in our kennels. One day an Adoptions staff member said, "If only we could find a person who gets seizures. They would understand." We contacted an organization that provides services and support for people with Epilepsy. They were more than happy to use the dog's photo and biography in their newsletter. Yes, he was adopted!

Okay, back to your question about font, size, etc. I like to use Times New Roman or Arial in 11 or 12 point. It's a reasonable size for writers and reporters to read. I find that if I'm using one of these fonts in this size, if the release becomes larger than one page, I'm trying to squeeze too much into it.

Whether or not you capitalize "For Immediate Release" is not as important as adding the date. If you want it to be immediate, they have to know when you sent it. Adding the date also gives a sense of urgency.

If you are using a readable font in a reasonable size, you can single space. If you're double spacing and it turns a one page release into a two page release, you just lowered the chances that anyone in a busy news room will take the time to read it. I save the double space as a way to separate paragraphs. And if you have a double space between paragraphs, no need to indent.

You also asked about the use of photos. They can be very effective if they're the right photo to really drive home the main message of your release. Another example. HWAC received a litter of six puppies that had been discovered in a dumpster in the desert. Our news release about the "Dumpster Puppies" asked the question of how anyone could look into their 4-week-old faces and convince themselves that these pups were garbage. When I e-mailed the release to the media (Subject line: Dumpster Puppies Rescued) I also attached a photo that was a close-up shot of 3 little furry faces.

This story was covered locally in San Diego and picked up nationally by several networks. Not only was it an interesting story, but it touched the hearts of everyone who read it. For the news editors who were considering whether or not to cover the story, the photo made the difference.

While we gave the numbers, dates, locations and other facts about the Dumpster Puppies, the gist of our story was what it "felt like" to look into their faces and try to understand how someone could give them an almost certain death sentence in the desert sun. How did it feel when we heard about them? How did it feel when we met them? How did it feel when we knew that they would all survive? How was it going to feel when they were adopted? THAT was the story that had to be told.

If it hasn't been obvious this week, I'm passionate about the public relations of Helen Woodward Animal Center. We have the honor of speaking on behalf of those who have no voice. We find homes for orphans that have no families. We provide humane education for the kids who will grow up to lead the world. We save lives. We bring comfort and the unconditional love of animals to abused and molested children, Alzheimer's patients, and accident victims. I work with an exceptional group of people who are changing the world by caring for others. I get paid to brag about what they do. It is an honor and a privilege.

Thank you to Best Friends and No More Homeless Pets for allowing me to be part of this. Thank you to Lynne Ouchida for her support and for sharing her ideas so that we can all do a better job of letting the public know about this important work we do.

Now, lean down and give your dog or cat a big kiss for me.

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Kindness to animals builds a better world for all of us.