



It's Time to Abandon Antiquated Beliefs about PR

Marketing Lure, Inc.

Catch more customers with great content.

"I'm too small."

"It's too expensive."

"I don't see the value."

"We don't have anything newsworthy to write about."

These are just a few of the comments I hear from clients when the subject of PR comes up. Most people still believe that press releases are only for large corporations with deep pockets.

But it's time to put away those antiquated notions and recognize that a press release program has a place in any size organization. Here is a peek at what one small, high tech software company achieved from a single press release.

Press Releases? Why Bother

Press releases not only work to build company credibility — something you need *especially* when you're starting out — they are a source of new website traffic, they help boost SEO rankings, and they can be a relatively cheap way to reach your target market.

Yes, I said cheap, because I'm not talking about paying one of the big-three PR distribution services.

I have found that you can have just as much success using a combination of low-cost and no-cost PR distribution services.

A Press Release Case Study Example: The Company

By all definitions, the company profiled in this story is your classic, bootstrapped software startup: small budgets, partners that split their time between this firm and their day jobs, and so on.

I helped them announce version 1.0 of their product 14 months ago. Not wanting to skimp too much, we chose to go with a regional distribution through a premium PR distribution service.

The primary goal of this second press release was to announce a new software version, but they also wanted me to weave into the story some tantalizing information about a new international partner. Pretty standard stuff.

The Mechanics

As I put pen to paper, I made sure to load this second press release with a choice keyword phrase the company targets for search engine optimization.

I issued the release through two free PR distribution services and one low-cost PR service.

The press release distributed through the low-cost service also contained links to two videos: a software overview and

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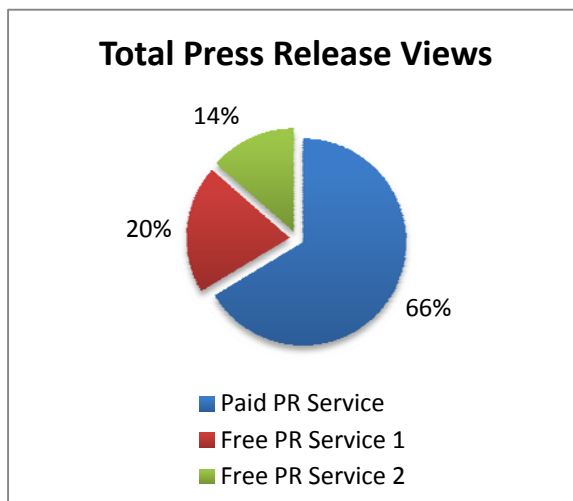
testimonial. The release distributed over the free channels did not include these links.

To further expand distribution, I used the social capabilities on one of the free services (Free PR Service 1 listed below) to broadcast the news on **Twitter** and **Digg**.

The Results

The press release generated eight **Google** alerts and attracted more than 500 sets of eyeballs over a 10-day period.

The chart below shows that the paid PR service outperformed the two free PR services by a factor of 2:1.

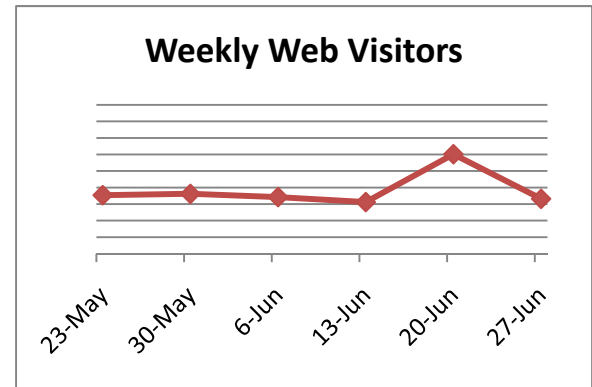


More than 56 online media sites, including **Google News** and channel behemoth **ChannelWeb**, picked up the press release issued over the paid distribution service.

Not bad, but what effect, if any, did the press release have on website traffic?

The second chart answers this question.

Both the total number of visitors and total number of unique visiting sites nearly tripled the week of distribution.



Moreover, the number of people that visited the company's free trial download page doubled during this same period.

Further analysis reveals that 71 percent of the visitors were first-time visitors, and the site's higher-than-average traffic rates lasted four days.

Online browsers found our paid press release on the first page of **Google's** search results. Five weeks later, this press release continues to rank high in Google and Google News for that keyword search.

Somewhat surprisingly, the number of people that viewed the software overview video also spiked one day after distribution. Unfortunately, the testimonial video did not fare as well.

Key Lessons

What can we take away from this one case study example? Here are five PR lessons.

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PR case study lesson #1: Expect a paid PR service to outperform free PR distribution services

When I compare the results of this press release to others I have done, the free distribution services performed better than expected.

Normally, the paid PR service I use outperforms the free services by a factor of 4:1 or greater.

Are the premium distribution services worth the extra cost? You be the judge.

Granted it is not a complete, apples-to-apples comparison, but the first press release issued 14 months ago cost \$380. Eighty-five media outlets picked up the story and we observed a two-day spike in web visitors (340 percent and 200 percent, respectively) immediately after distribution. Pre-release traffic levels resumed day three.

The second press release cost \$99. Fifty-six media outlets picked up the story and we observed a four-day spike in web visitors (290 percent, 270 percent, 207 percent, and 165 percent, respectively). Pre-release traffic levels resumed day five.

If your goal is to minimize cost and maximize website traffic and eyeballs, a lower-cost PR distribution service fits the bill.

If on the other hand your goal is to strictly create a news archive to boost credibility and SEO, then the free PR distribution services are perfectly acceptable.

PR case study lesson #2: Low-cost and no-cost are not binary options

Companies can expand their reach by issuing press releases over a combination of paid and free distribution services.

In this one example, the free services accounted for 34 percent of the total press release views. We would have missed this significant audience if we had ignored the free distribution services.

PR case study lesson #3: Don't expect long-term results from one release

Like any form of advertising, a single press release will yield a short burst of traffic.

To maintain momentum, you will need an overall PR strategy that involves distributing multiple press releases over the course of many months.

PR case study lesson #4: Make your press releases interactive

This is the first release where I experimented with video, and I was surprised to see how many people took the time to watch a software overview.

Here is an opportunity where you can wow your readers with a brief video that supports your press release content.

Who knows, the video might be the tipping point that gets your company written up in a trade magazine or more prospects in your sales funnel.

PR case study lesson #5: Load your press releases with choice keywords

Don't, and you are missing out on an opportunity for free e-mail marketing — compliments of Google.

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Many reporters, industry watchers, and your target market use Google News alerts to stay abreast of current events.

Populate your press releases with the keywords they are watching, and Google will notify them whenever you have news to report.

Conclusion

Critics will argue that measuring press release views and website visitors are weak marketing metrics. I agree, but it is also unrealistic to expect a press release to serve as your sales force.

Many websites today serve as a marketing hub, driving people into the sales funnel with content and calls to action. Qualified leads are given to sales to close the deal.

Press releases are only an entry point into this sales funnel. It is up to you to figure out how to move people captured by this one marketing tactic through it.

Likewise, it is unrealistic to assume that all of your press releases will be winners. I have observed press release views as high as 1,960 and as low as 395.

How well your press release performs will depend on your ability to “spin a story,” your target market, the day and time it is issued, and what else is happening in the

world. A long-term press release program will iron out any inconsistencies.

Press releases are not a silver bullet, but they have evolved into an easy, low-cost, and measurable way to reach your target market online.

About Marketing Lure

Marketing Lure writer Sue Anderson-Lenz helps small businesses reach more customers by creating credible, customer-focused websites and marketing material.

After working more than 15 years in the software industry as a programmer, tester, manager, and director, Sue left the technical world to run an online business resource for software entrepreneurs. There she was responsible for marketing, content creation and publication, business development, customer service, and revenue.

Sue is Pragmatic Marketing-certified and her work has appeared in electronic and print journals, including **Website Magazine**, **SoftwareCEO**, **TechRepublic**, **CIO**, **Intranets**, and **Home Business Magazine**.

Visit <http://www.marketinglure.com> for more free marketing resources and tips.



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