

Modelling project:

'Getting a press release published'

Bristol NLP Practitioner course 98/99

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Abstract:

This project is about getting a press release published in publications: specifically newspapers and magazines. It does not deal with the writing in any detail, but with the steps involved in communicating with the media until publication of the piece has been achieved.

It is worthwhile pointing out at this stage that a distinction has been made in this project between a 'press release' and an 'article'. This project will focus on a 'press release' which may be for the press or magazines.

An 'article' for press or magazines would involve a slightly different approach in terms of writing. An article is defined here as a piece of writing commissioned by one publication. You as the writer of the article would assume authorship, as long as the written piece was not altered. The publication would assume rights over the article. It could not be submitted to other publications for use.

A press release is defined here as a piece of writing targeted at one or more publications for use by the publication as they see fit.

For anyone interested, the writing of an article would take more account of fitting in with the targeted media, whereas a press release need not focus on this so heavily - a press release would be written once, for one or more publications. The process for actually approaching the media to secure publication, however, would be largely similar for either a press release or an article. Although an article is more likely to be an agreed piece of work between both the writer and the publisher.

Introduction:

I was particularly interested in finding out how to get press releases published. My interest comes from being a keen writer myself, often inspired to write 'press releases/articles' but not putting much thought as to where they might end up!. I wanted to find out more to be able to put more purpose to my writing. In addition I wanted to apply my learnings at work for the purposes of securing media publicity.

Methodology:

I wanted to model a tried and tested method of getting press and magazine press releases published. My model, Martin Shervington, is a writer in his mid twenties with a book due for publication in 2000. He has successfully written and had published a number of press releases and articles in the press and magazines. The methodology for modelling Martin's approach comprised:

- 2 meetings
- Role play
- Use of modelling techniques: Simple modelling questions, Multi level modelling, TOTE, Strategy Elicitation

Meeting One

My first meeting with Martin took a broad, detailed and informal approach to exploring the activities undertaken leading up to and including the publication of a press release. We met for three hours and ran a face to face 'interview'.

Meeting Two

My second meeting, of approximately another three hours, used more specific modelling skills to elicit the strategies and detail:

- Multi level modelling
- TOTE questions
- Strategy Elicitation - using a role play situation to gather the information

Results:

Preparation of the press release.

This section will take an overview of the process for preparing and writing a press release

The core of this modelling project focuses on the steps to get a finished press release published rather than the process of writing a press release for publication. However it is important to outline Martin's approach to achieving a marketable press release in order to give a complete picture.

I have not spent time gathering information about the conditions and behavioural details that are important for Martin in the process of writing a press release. However, for those interested in the conditions necessary for Martin to go through the writing process, briefly: Martin writes sitting on a bean bag which supports his back well, and uses a lap top computer on his lap. Or he sits on the edge of a seat ensuring that he maintains a good posture. He prefers to be on his own without interruption, if possible, for achieving the desired flow state!.

Martin outlined the practical steps for writing a suitable press release as follows:

Martin's initial comments to me during meeting 'number one' were to first think about:

- topical issues to 'latch on to' so that the press release has relevance in the context of current affairs
- ideas to make the press release punchy, 'sexy', eye catching
- the personality, tone and content of the target publication so that the press release can be designed to 'fit in' with the selected media title

On the second [meeting](#) in between which, a few months had passed, Martin suggested that the above thoughts were not, after all, crucial for a press release, although they are valid points and useful to consider. (An article would definitely benefit from taking into account the above points). Martin said that a press release could be written around any topic. The skill is 'selling in' the idea to the publication. Martin outlined the following practical steps for preparation and writing.

Researching media titles

- Obtain copy of 'Brad' directory - available in libraries. (**'Brad' lists all sorts** of publications with summary information about each one)
- Run through 'Brad' and pick relevant press titles and magazine titles for targeting. Remember magazines have longer circulation than the press and so the press release will have a longer 'life' in a magazine. A monthly magazine, for example, is likely to stay in a household for a longer period of time than a daily newspaper. A monthly magazine is more likely to be read over a period of time.
- Note down any useful information given in 'Brad' such as descriptions, circulation etc.
- Write down editor name, PA names, telephone and fax numbers
- Contact editors or PA, make notes of contact names given for addressing press release
- Find out the timings involved and if there are any critical deadlines

Writing the press release

- If writing a press release then 'hot' issues and hooks etc. are not so important as for an article
- Second positioning is key, the important factors in respect of your press release are:
 - how will the press release get noticed?
 - what is the press release about?
 - who is it for?
 - what are the benefits of the topic you are writing about?
 - what will the reader get?
 - why should the publication publish it?
- If you are trying to address a range of target audiences, a press releases is a useful vehicle because you can duplicate the release for publication in many titles - reaching more people. Whereas an article, in most cases, can only be printed once in one title, because the printing title will assume rights over the article preventing it from begin reprinted elsewhere.
- Write the press release to the standard format (appendix one)

Other points

- Once you come to talking on the telephone with the media about your written work, it is useful to remember that this is often easier when you are talking about work that you produced yourself. You will understand what is at the 'heart' of what you are trying to communicate, and will be better placed to talk about it than anyone else. (You may find that some people decide your writing is clumsy, but if you are well prepared mentally as well as practically, this is an easy obstacle to overcome)
- Sometimes the media is more enthusiastic if you are writing about your own venture/business (however only mention this if your media contact raises the issue). Again you are the one with all the facts at your fingertips if the subject of your writing belongs to you.

How to get the press release published

The overall process for getting the press release published involves using fax, letter, and the telephone to communicate with the identified media contact.

Persistence, patience, respect, and the ability to 'make friends' with your contact, no matter what, is required at all times for building successful relationships. So a lot of second positioning ('putting yourself in your contact's shoes') and reframing (looking at things from another, more helpful, perspective) will be required along the way!

Having identified the appropriate contact, and having prepared your finished press release you will need to:

1. fax and post the press release
2. make your first follow up call between 3 days and a week - avoid the morning's - the media are notoriously busy in the mornings and are likely to have little time for you! (See TOTE Model and Strategy Elicitation for details on using the telephone)
3. if, when you telephone to follow up, your contact has not received the article, fax again, and phone straight away, then phone again in 3 days to a week
4. have your 'spiel' ready - sell the benefits, what the readers, and the publication are going to get

Modelling frameworks used to understand the process:

I used a number of NLP modelling techniques to obtain detailed information from Martin regarding 'how, specifically' he goes about getting the finished press release published. The findings centre around Martin's use of the telephone to communicate with the media, this being his primary and main tool.

The results gave me detailed insights into the way in which Martin approaches communicating with the media when trying to get a press release published. This provided me with a deep understanding of the process to add to the practical steps, given above. The practical steps alone, are not enough to replicate Martin's results.

Multi level modelling.

Through the techniques of multi-level modelling I gathered information on Martin's strategies for communicating on the telephone with the media.

Environment:

Martin described his needs as follows:

- Room with telephone, surface for literature and seat
- No music on
- All literature needed to hand, and pen and paper ready
- Press release ready in draft - or final piece
- A comfortable seat

Behaviours:

Before the call

- Sitting upright with back straight and always abdominally breathing
- A feeling of being centred and relaxed by:
 - sitting still for 5 minutes before making the call, helping to centre self and relax
- Talking to self internally e.g. 'it's not that important' and 'it's not the end of the world if nothing happens' to reduce any build up of stress
- Jotting down any of his key words as memory joggers to help towards the flow of conversation
- Picking up handset of phone ready to make call, with pen in hand and papers ready

During the call

- Ready to second position the person being contacted in order to deal smoothly with objections, and understand where they are 'coming from'
- Ready to highlight benefits (of publishing press release in their publication) - making sure the content of your conversation matches what is in the press release
- Ready to jot down your contacts' key words to help build relevance in and keep thread of conversation
- Ask switchboard (if that's who you get) for direct line telephone for your contact
- Keep any and all jargon out of conversation - get straight to your point

- Friendly tone and relaxed
- If your contact is interested in principle, be ready to talk through with examples with which they can connect. This can be a simple every day example that most people are likely to identify with.
- Internal talking continues e.g. "It's O.K. if this doesn't work, there'll be other opportunities"
- Martin has an underlying 'knowing' that he will continue to look for, and take action on, new opportunities
- Ready to do an automatic reframe on everything

Capabilities:

- Phone skills
- Reasonable writer: writing for a press article does not need to be so well done as for an article.
- Reads newspapers and watches television - or is fed with information through networking
- Relatively organised with paperwork
- Being aware of proper time management and when he is rushing
- Knowledge to impart: mind, body and soul teachings to be integrated into mainstream life.
- Qualified by training in Qi Gong, Yoga, NLP and widely read: writers on global evolution, consciousness evolution, Taoism, and other related fields
- Needs to be able to be flexible and ready with a solution if problems arise - know your stuff and how far to go with it

Beliefs:

- Incredibly strong belief in benefits being sold - the purpose of the writing is to make people feel more energised and positive
- Committed - Martin has been more 'laid back' in his approach to writing for publication in the past, but financial responsibilities have given Martin a greater commitment to getting the work completed
- Important to focus on one project at a time to give it importance
- All writing projects/published projects have been important - this is helpful particularly when old projects are being resurfaced. Feelings of dissatisfaction can arise with 'old' work, like thinking "I wouldn't have done it like that now", but previous work should be remembered for the achievement that it was at the time, and that it will still be important to a certain group of customers
- I am enthusiastic
- NLP and positive thinking remains alien to a lot of people - it seems 'fluffy' and inaccessible. This leaves a large target market to connect with for the natural progression of evolution
- It is our (human beings) purpose to direct the natural progression of evolution, we are the one thing that can give direction to it on this planet
- There is a spiritual unfolding in process

Identity:

- A relatively business like person - have a purpose, quite official but human - not jokey

Spiritual

Martin's short summary was:

Spirit manifest (i.e. all life and things) has come about as first matter, second physically and

mentally, and finally it will return to spirit - it's inevitable.

- Martin is trying to make mind and body principles, insights and matters more accessible for mainstream public. Filtering down good 'stuff' to mainstream culture, and beyond this giving people the opportunity to take on some of the principles.

- In the process of using the phone he believes that he has something to offer. People are put off by the vehicles used at present e.g. Tai Chi, Yoga, NLP, because they don't understand them and so these practices don't seem relevant to reality. Tai Chi is an advanced practice and people are not ready for it yet. They don't understand it, so don't understand the benefits. Tai Chi can be used to experience more pleasure in the body by working with the mind and the body as one. This can help to deal with physical problems and mental problems. Tai Chi is used at the moment as a 'hot' topic, but not properly understood.

- Until people integrate the mind and body, most things aren't going to be of much interest. If people have reconnected the mind and body, things like Tai Chi can take them further, if not Tai Chi will not help as it is an advanced practice and needs to be understood to be of benefit. So it is important to give people tasters, to get them thinking about how alive they really are: e.g. did you realise that you were not aware of your body? and offer them thought provoking ideas to play with. Small snippets of information, and thought provoking ideas can begin to bring about shifts in consciousness.

TOTE model

I used the TOTE model to understand more about his behaviours on the telephone

Test

Outcome: To get positive reaction to press release and possible publication

Evidence: Rapport with contact, friendly tone, light and happy, own feeling of flow, interested contact asking questions, affirmative message from contact for routes forward, being offered more information, being invited to send article or rewritten article, and.... ultimately being told press release will be published

Operate

Pick up phone fully prepared (as outlined in multi-level modelling)

Notice feedback from contact

If going wrong: Understand where my contact is coming from, suggest, respond with appropriate words. Could be a call back suggestion, or something to empathise genuinely, or willingness to leave alone until a later time. Perhaps ask what is coming up in the future for which it would be useful to receive written material. Ask what issues would be relevant. Ask to ring again in a month.

Test

Repeat operation as above. Notice feedback. Make appropriate response.

Exit

Role play and strategy elicitation

I elicited the strategy for making telephone calls from Martin whilst he role played making a telephone call

The overall notation was:

Ki Vc Ae Vc Ae Ae Ki Ae Ae Ki

The detail behind the above notation is as follows:

Before the call. No dialogue. Blank. Remind self about goal. Has notes to hand about what will be said.

Phone ringing. Ki

Feeling in his mid solar plexus, slightly rising. Up feeling. A little excited. Feeling of motivation.

Phone answered. Vc

Imagines front desk reception.

then Ae

Talks to person. If it is the person he wants.. then Vc (see also below**)

Has brighter image, rows of desks. There is a desk at the front at which the person answering the call is sitting. That person has a sunny light around them.

Talks more to person. Ae

"Hi how are you, I want...."

at the same time as talking, Ki

He is on a mission, he has a feeling in a higher place than middle of solar plexus

then Ae

He talks and asks for fax number and name to address his article to. He is always given this.

then Ae

He thanks the person for the details, he has his list ready for obtaining all the details he wants.

Puts the phone down Ki

Feels happy. All across his shoulders there is a nice feeling. Whilst he has this good feeling he moves on to the next stage of actioning the process

** (See above. The actions below replace those above if difficulty arises)

If for any reason he is expecting a difficult call then the previous feeling Ki

is a slightly more sunken feeling

at the same time Vc

sees an empty cut off box room with no light

When person comes on phone Vc

sees a big head of the person, imagined

Then talks to person Ae

May try to make an appropriate joke or light of the situation
continues as above

Practical application

The information gathered in this modelling project is a useful resource for anyone new and interested in producing press releases.

Press releases are a useful way of gaining publicity across a range of publications. The fact that a number of publications can be targeted at once, means that writing a press release is a cost effective method for taking a message to a large and wide ranging audience.

For anyone reading this project and referring to this section 'Practical Application' only, it is worth reading the 'Abstract' and the 'Introduction' sections at the beginning. The first section of 'Results', up to the beginning of 'Multi level modelling' is also a straight forward read as well as practical in conjunction with this section.

To successfully publish a press release the main areas to focus on are:

Reasons for writing:

- Why are you writing a press release?
- What is important about it?
- What benefit does it have for people?
- What message are you trying to get across?
- What are you trying to share?
- How will it be noticed?
- What will make it stand out?
- Why should it be published?

Motivation:

- If you are writing the press release for your own business or concern, it is often easier in terms of a) motivation: perhaps you want to achieve greater awareness of your concern, or more business etc.. You may need to generate revenue, and perhaps some of your revenue needs to be generated by a time specific deadline.
- b) talking about it: you will know your 'service' or 'product' or 'point of view' better than anyone else, so you will be well prepared to handle most questions
- Sometimes, you will find that a media contact is particularly interested in your exploit if YOU are the business. This can help. However it is best to leave it to your contact to raise this issue.
- If you are writing the press release for someone else it is worth considering the above points and putting yourself 'in the shoes' of the 'owner' of the matter. You will convince in writing and verbally far better if you 'own' the assignment.
- If you were to think about what is driving you beyond the actual task of writing a press release for a business purpose, what would that be? It is useful to understand what it is you are trying to achieve beyond the day-to-day needs. or even beyond the five-year business plan. Identify the purpose to your work and your life and then come back and see how each specific activity fits in to the big plan. It is very powerful to remember how each task is helping to achieve the greater plan.

Your communication style

- You should consider how you come across in writing and on the telephone and what lies behind your motivations. Being well prepared will get faster results. Are there any areas where you are

weak, or you could improve? For example, do you get defensive easily? If so, you can perhaps try to understand where this comes from within you and work on removing that behaviour when it is not serving a useful purpose. You need to be functioning at your optimal state to achieve the results you want - as we will only consider positive results here. If there is work to be done on the effectiveness of your communication, you may want to consider training programmes to deal with removing any unhelpful patterns.

- You will need flexibility and adaptability to succeed with ease. Being aware that your style may not always suit another person's style, and being able to deal with that, will help you to develop a flexibility and adaptability in your communications for all sorts of situations.
- Always try to establish the style of your target media, to match or complement it as best possible.
- There are many opposing arguments for 'how to write'. Some people are of the opinion that there is room for all individual styles and that you should freely write to reflect your own personality. Others argue that you should adopt standard 'rules' for good copy writing. You may want to consider your view on this. Perhaps research the commonly accepted principles and then make up your own mind.
- How you come across on the telephone is likely to be key to your success. Perhaps it would be useful to think about how you like to be dealt with on the telephone, ideally. Can you come across like this when you are on the telephone - as the 'seller'. Perhaps you like a nice friendly tone, someone who is willing to understand your point of view, someone who will not waste your time and talk to you about what you are interested in, or hit a chord of interest somehow. And perhaps you know how it feels when someone respects the fact that you are not interested, *and* when they don't do this. Consider any areas in which you could improve.

The qualities that make you, you. Dealing with difficult situations

- What drives you? What motivates you? What do you think are your best qualities? How do you think about things? Do you have any driving beliefs about life? All these questions are worth working through. The more you understand yourself, the better able you will be able to deal with diverse situations, and the more confidence you will have when the going gets tough! For example if you feel driven to share something that you believe is important and for the good of others, and if you believe you are a genuine and honest person, but able to put your opinions to one side in the face of a different opinion to understand others - all this will help you. For example, if you are being challenged: you will know in your heart that your intention is good and should be able to let go of the desire to convince. Or, maybe if you find yourself talking to someone who doesn't understand what you are offering: you will not feel so inclined to force your view on others and will be able to listen to other people's opinions and understand other people's point of view. You will be able to communicate taking into account the opinion of someone else. This will help in building relationships, even in some of the most apparently awkward or difficult situations.
- If you there are personal traits that you would prefer to be different, then consider any training courses that might help you work through these issues. Or perhaps you may know a friend who has the qualities you aspire to, who would be willing to work through things with you.

Your working environment

- You may want to consider other things that are important to you in following through the process of getting a press release published, for example:
 - a) do you need a comfortable room and all the right equipment
 - b) do you need quiet or some noise

Your skills and capabilities:

- Do you need to acquire any extra skills? e.g. writing, telephone skills or some other training that would be relevant and improve your chances of success

Having prepared yourself, the following steps look at going to the next stages of producing a press release.

Researching media titles

- What are the relevant titles for your topic area(s)
- Check the 'Brad' directories ('Brad' is a useful reference for publications listing summary information such as: main topic areas, target audience, circulation, editor names etc.) in your local Library to get relevant media titles - note the contact names (editor, PAs etc.), telephone numbers, fax numbers, time scales, deadlines etc.

Note, if the title comes under an umbrella organisation such as 'EMAP Elan'. When you contact this type of company you will need to remember to ask for "the PA to the Editor of 'xyz' magazine" as the umbrella company will be heading up a number of titles.

Writing the article:

- You may want to write a draft initially to be time effective and to use as your point of reference when you first talk to the media. This will allow you to sound out the response and fine tune your press release accordingly. You may also find other useful information at this stage, such as contact names, deadlines etc.
- Put yourself in the position of the titles' editor and of the readers: ask yourself: What is it (the point etc.)?, Why is it different?, Who does it affect? What will it get the reader? How much does it cost? How can the reader get more information? etc.
- Are you writing to a deadline - what are the time scales (you may want to check this with a phone call first, if you have not done so already)
- When you send the final piece, address it to the right person and use the accepted format (appendix one)

Contacting the media:

- If calling an umbrella organisation, e.g. EMAP Elan, you will need to ask for "the PA to the Editor of 'xyz' magazine". This is because the umbrella organisation will be heading up a number of titles.
- Ask the PA for the fax number and tell him/her the subject of the article. They should be able to let you know who will be the right person for the subject. Don't go into detail at this stage, just outline enough for obtaining the appropriate addressee. (You may have contacted the media title before when preparing to write, as suggested above, in which case this call may be to briefly let the appropriate person know that you are about to send the press release to them)
- Fax and post your press release to the title(s). The press release should be presented in the standard format (appendix one)

NB: for a press release you can target a number of titles at once. If you were writing an article you would generally be writing to an agreement for one publication only, and the publication would probably want rights over the article, although you would retain authorship, if it was not altered.

- Follow up with a phone call in 3 days to a week. Phone in the afternoons, The mornings are busy and you may not get the reception you want so easily!
- If the contact has not received your press release, fax and post it again and ring immediately to check it has arrived

- Follow up again in 3 days to a week.
- When communicating using the telephone: remember to be well prepared; ready to be able to explain the unique selling point of your written piece; ready to hear another viewpoint; ready to listen and accept rejection; ready to be persistent but appropriate; ready to put yourself 'in the other person's shoes'; ready to agree the most suitable way forward.

Feedback, evaluation and future projects

The process of building media relationships and securing publicity becomes easier over time. Regular contact will ensure that you keep relationships growing.

Evaluate the performance of a press release if possible. If the press release gave contact details, such as a telephone number, or something similar, then it would be possible to count responses and later, conversions if applicable. It would also be useful to ascertain cost effectiveness by measuring time and other costs spent against revenue earned, if this is an important part of the exercise.

Ongoing work with the same media titles can eventually bring opportunities to you such as being approached by the media for a press piece that they would like you to produce.

Appendix One

Format for press release

PRESS RELEASE

YOUR NAME
ADDRESS

CONTACT NAME (Use this if you want
TITLE to personalise your
ADDRESS communication)

DEAR.....

"NAME OF MAGAZINE"

TITLE: *e.g.* PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT DURING THE SUMMER

• WHAT IS IT?

SPLIT TOPIC IF NECESSARY, E.G.

• WHY IS IT DIFFERENT?

1. **MEN & WOMEN AT WORK**

• WHO?

2. **MEN & WOMEN AT HOME**

• HOW MUCH DOES IT COST?

Use c. 400 words. It is possible to go to 1,000 - 1,500 words which is c. 2 x A4 pages, 12pt.

----END----

FOR MORE DETAILS CALL enter your own details

NOTES FOR EDITOR: e.g. further to our telephone conversation please find etc.