

Guide to writing a press release

Information for Orthoptic Associations, Clinics and Orthoptic programs

If you're organising an activity, or even if you just want to publicize World Orthoptic Day, then sending a press release to publications and other media outlets is a good way of trying to get your message across.

Sell your message

A busy journalist will receive many press releases every day and will read them very quickly, often not getting past the first paragraph. You will therefore need an enticing heading and first paragraph to sell the story as quickly as possible. The first paragraph needs to summarise the story, tell the reader what is happening/being said, and explain why it is important. You need your press release to present an interesting story to the journalist, and not just present a list of facts. Think about this when planning your campaign or event for World Orthoptic Day. Interesting angles can be provided by: human interest stories, a new ground-breaking project, a survey, a celebrity/politician speaking out, and an unusual event.

Keep it specific and brief

Try and make sure your press release deals in specifics, not generalities. Statistics – for example on the global problem of vision or lack of vision screening and pediatric causes of vision loss - are a good way of substantiating your story. Keep the press release as concise and to-the-point as possible. You can always attach a separate sheet with background information such as relevant world and local statistics. Remember the main function of a press release is to grab attention. Once a journalist is interested they will contact you if they need further details.

Clear presentation

A press release should instantly be recognisable as one. It should be typed with good spaces between lines and paragraphs, ideally on one page, with additional information provided separately.

Make sure you include...

Ensure that the press release is dated and that you provide contact details for someone who can provide further information.

Timing

Different media outlets need different amounts of advance notice of events and news they are going to cover – if you want to get coverage in a monthly publication, it's likely they'll need much more notice than a daily publication, or a radio station. But generally speaking, you need to consider getting a first press release out at least four weeks before the activity starts.

Following up

If you don't hear back from the person you sent the press release to, don't be afraid to make a phone call to check that they received it and whether there is any further information they would like. However, don't call too often as this can end up annoying journalists.

Sample press release

If you want to see a good example of a completed press release, go to www.unicef.org/media/media_44291.html