

Public relations tools

Methodological support

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Introduction

Public relations are a **necessity for:**

- giving news
- putting rumours to rest
- occupying the media space that pertains to you
- promoting better awareness of your activity as an individual or entity

Unless you have a very popular wall or accumulate friends on social networks, the media are the **only means of communication with the public.**

Public relations cannot however be properly grasped **without an awareness** of the level of information in the media:

- using Internet search tools
- looking for hashtags [#] by keywords on Twitter feeds
- watching a 24-hr news channel
- reading feature articles in the print news media

You then need to be **effective, by choosing:**

- the time of your statement
- the location of your press conference
- the professional to be used for two-person oral communications
- the right tool...

... and **knowing how to use it by making it your own.**

Sheet 1: Press releases

- Purpose:** to quickly and simultaneously provide the media with official written information.
- Timing:** as soon as possible, to take control and establish a position, even if only for announcing the date of your press conference (which will not prevent telephone enquiries from journalists).
- Advantage:** the choice of words: they'll be your own.
- Disadvantage:** press releases are too short to provide much information.
- Audience:** your list of media contacts + agency journalists + journalists' associations + media that cover the subject of your statement.
- Format:** one page, a maximum of 15 lines.

Methodology - what the press release should contain:

Presentation:

- At the top of the page: the logo, the entity, the communicator (unless noted in the title), and the date
- In the title: "Press release"
- At the bottom of the page: media contact + contact details

Text:

- Your text should start with your message.
- ☒ Message = your primary information = what you would like to see reported in the media once your statement has been made.
 - The press release should:
 - be clear, concise, and instructive,
 - not contain any unexplained abbreviations or acronyms, or overly technical terms,
 - be prioritized so as to proceed from your message on to the less important information,
 - not contain more than two messages; it is also important to save some material for your press conference.

Sample informational press release:



Court of Appeals of XXX
 Court of First Instance of XXX XXX

Public Prosecutor's News Release

Following (*a particular stage of proceedings*), the public prosecutor for XXX, (*name, surname*), will hold a press conference along with (*official partner, XXX*) on (*date, time and exact location*).

Please kindly confirm your attendance by email to the following address:
sec-procureurXX@justice.fr

Media Contact:
 (*first name, last name*), *deputy public prosecutor: (telephone and email address)*

Sheet 2: Press conferences

- Purpose:** to provide official, complementary, verbal and controlled information and to answer questions from journalists, and thus from citizens; to allow the media to obtain pictures.
- Timing:** quickly, in order to keep control.
- Advantage:** you're running the show.
- Disadvantage:** the preparation time will always seem too short.
- Audience:** your list of media contacts + agency journalists + journalists' associations + media that cover the subject of your statement.
- Format:** a statement, followed by a period of time for questions / answers with journalists.

Methodology: Questions to ask yourself

4 focuses for preparatory work:

➤ Calibrate:

☒ How much time are you going to be able to devote to this statement?

In light of the level of information you have at the time of your statement, it is important to determine how much time you can devote to it. Indicating this in your preamble (just after the standard "Hello") will allow you to permit just a couple of final questions before leaving the room.

➤ Your message:

☒ What is your message? = your primary information = what you want to be reported in the media at the end of your statement.

Start with your message, and give it again in the conclusion.

Prioritizing your speech, starting with the most important parts, gives you additional flexibility: if your statement becomes too long, you can stop early before the intended conclusion: the remaining details will be provided as part of your answers to the journalists' questions.

➤ Your image:

☒ What kind of judge or prosecutor are you? = what is the image of yourself you wish to project in this press conference? What image do you want to project for the institution you represent?

Pick an adjective for that image and embody it: tone of voice, body language, choice of words, setting, etc. Be that kind of judge or prosecutor from when you enter the room to when you leave.

➤ Preparation / role play:

☒ If you were...? You now have the outline of your speech ready. Now imagine if you were:

- the families: is there anything in your remarks that might offend them?
- the defence: is your statement solid? No shaky assumptions?
- your hierarchical superiors: have they been informed?
- Make adjustments based on your answers to these three questions.
- The journalists: what questions would you ask?

- Prepare your responses. And prepare your non-responses too: Aside from respect for the families, there is a range of legal grounds you can also use to explain why you can't answer particular questions that day.

Recommendations:

Information: know what the media are saying before you give your press conference, the objective being to avoid being surprised by a question about a detail you thought was secret.

The partner: If you're making your statement alongside a partner, it is essential that you frame your remarks properly, to ensure that you've clearly established your respective roles and of the elements to be delivered.

Position: communicating while seated is reassuring. However, giving a press conference standing allows you to:

- give a broader visual range to journalists,
- stay upright,
- leave the room more easily.

Location: Certain cases may require a statement to be made on site. You should nevertheless always take care to provide the proper setting for your remarks:

Setting and dress: these choices should not interfere with your statement by indicating the opposite of your message by their ostentatious nature. Keep a neutral outfit in your office so that you can change into it at the last moment. It's not vanity to take a look at yourself in the mirror!

Support: enlisting the services of a professional will help you to ensure that the journalists are ready at the moment you make your statement. This way you can avoid having to do any waiting in front of the camera, and you can begin to make your statement immediately.

This partner should also take a look at your statement before you give it and make constructive criticisms, and then recapitulate it with you.

The partner can also handle the following instruments:

The list of journalists: to collect contact information for the journalists present, on a blank sheet placed at the entrance of the room.

Press release: putting together a possible press release to be released after your press conference (this is necessary if the subject is highly technical).

The documents: You shouldn't just read written material at a press conference; you should go beyond that: your written supporting documents should contain only a few words (your outline) or numbers. Instead of serving as a support for you, it could end up throwing you off, or even tripping you up.

Repetition: a journalist may end up asking you about details you've already given. By playing along you can give those details in a more limited form.

 **Announcement** = giving informational elements to journalists without allowing them to ask questions. This format remains frustrating for everyone.

Sheet 3: Press kits

- Purpose:** to provide official and complete information to journalists.
- Timing:** as a technical supplement to a statement.
- Advantage:** you can choose and weigh each word, each number.
- Disadvantage:** this tool is only useful when it is suited to the circumstances.
- Audience:** your list of media contacts + agency journalists + journalists' associations + media that cover the subject of your statement.
- Format:** each subject should be handled separately, and given a maximum of one page each.

Methodology:

Presentation:

- At the bottom of each page: media contact + contact details
- Flyleaf:
 - At the top of the page: the logo, the entity, the communicator (unless noted in the title), the date,
 - A title, and if relevant to the subject, a photo
- 2nd page: contents page
- 3rd page, and if relevant to the subject: a summary of the contents of the press kit
- Following pages: the documents, or titles, and the content

Text:

- A press kit should follow the same rules for public relations, and in that sense it should be clear, informative, concise, and instructive.
- Any numbered, chronological, or practical data will be a bonus in that it will allow journalists to better illustrate their remarks. This may also contain, per sheet: copyright-free photographs, key figures, glossary, appendices, etc.

Example:



Appeals Court of...
Court of First Instance of ... Date...

Press kit

XXX

Contents

- Sheet 1: Chronology of the facts and proceedings
- Sheet 2: The participants in the trial
- Sheet 3: Key data
- Sheet 4: Procedural elements / articles of law
- Sheet 5: Estimated trial schedule
- Sheet 6: Practical Information

Media Contact:

(first name, last name), deputy public prosecutor: (telephone and email address)

Sheet 4: Press files

- Purpose:** to have media contacts available immediately.
Timing: regularly updated: as journalists change media types, contact information, etc.
Advantages: saves time.
Disadvantages: none.
Audience: your staff, your secretary.
Format: file.

Methodology:

Arrangement per column:

- First name
- Name
- Outlet
- Media type (print, web, radio, television)
- Mobile phone or a 2nd phone line
- Professional email address or personal email address

Sheet 5: final recommendations

Nothing is ever set in stone:

Take the time to choose the right communications tool and consider it in light of the case, the specifics of your locality, the issues at hand, etc. Make these materials work for you!

Save time!

Always be prepared for possible communications activities by always having the following available:

- an updated press file,
- the list and contact details of your partners close at hand,
- the basic outline of your press release
- a basic outline of your press kit,
- a predefined and neutral venue for communications, to be used for emergency statements
- a staff member always available to work on it with you, listen to you and support you, especially one who is able to provide you with constructive and timely critique.

Once you have calibrated and established your statement and the subjects to which you will respond (or not):

Be confident, be attentive to competent advisors, and stay the course!

Don't forget that news items come and go, and above all, remember that a successful statement is one that makes the least noise. Never regret not making waves.