

How to Maximize Your News Releases for B2B Lead Generation

Do your company's news releases just sit on your website, slowly fading into obscurity? A news release can be a powerful tool for creating product awareness and generating sales leads for B2B and technology companies, *if it is written, formatted and distributed properly.*

Having your news releases on your web site is a good first step, but many prospective buyers will never get to your website because they don't know your company. Research shows that B2B product purchasers generally begin by searching the Internet for solutions to specific problems. Only after narrowing their search, do they go to specific vendor websites. The key for vendors is to develop a thought leadership presence under search terms that customers will use in the buying process.

1. Target prospects at Stage 2 of the B2B buying cycle.

According to a *MarketingProfs* study, the B2B buying cycle has four recognizable stages and each of these audiences requires a different content approach.

- **Unaware:** Buyer has need, but not explicitly in the market; content should be interruptive.
- **Tentative:** Buyer is considering purchase, but has no budget; content should be educational.
- **Engaged:** Buyer is comparing vendors, talking to you; content should be validating.
- **Invested:** The buyer is a customer, some content should be exclusive.

Tentative buyers have made a preliminary decision to buy – if they can find the right solution at the right price. They have not yet created a list of vendors. The key to engaging the tentative buyer is to be visible when they are searching for the products you provide. In order to engage with them earlier in the buying cycle, you need to be found within the topics and keywords that someone would search on before they even know about your company name. When they search on Google or Yahoo, they are not entering your company's name, they are entering three-four terms describing the problem they face (e.g. HIPAA breach notification).

2. Get found with a high Google search ranking.

All marketing professionals know the importance of a high Google ranking, however, many mistakenly focus on getting good rankings for their company name. This is a misplaced effort. Your most important search term is *not* your name.

Tentative buyers are looking for solutions to specific problems, not company names. They are looking under terms such as “HIPAA breach notification,” “pharmacy inventory management” or “employee scheduling.” **The most effective search terms are three-five words long.** Single words like “hospital” or “pharmacy” are too general to be of much use in search marketing.

Once you have identified your list of key search terms, determine how you can apply them in upcoming company news releases. A good headline should contain the name of the company, the product name and the keyword. For example, it might read, “Acmesoft Introduces XLTracker, HIPAA Breach Notification Software for Hospitals.”

Ideally, your headline will be 60 characters or less (the limit on the Google search engine), but this may not always be possible. In your first paragraph, expand on the product description, including more on what the product does and who will use it (e.g. ER physicians, pharmacists, billing staff).

In general, keep your news release to a maximum of 400 words to avoid overage charges on the news wires. For some major products, however, you may need 500 or even 600 words to provide a complete, detailed explanation.

Write in clear, specific language. Avoid buzz words such as *leading edge*, *industry leading*, *leverage*, *synergy*, *leverage*, *user-friendly* and *mission critical*. Use testimonial quotes from customers or industry analysts, if appropriate.

3. Tell how *your product* addresses *their problem*.

A marketing adage says “**to sell drills, talk about holes.**”

Too many news releases fall flat because they don’t sufficiently discuss the problems of your customers. Too often company news releases just list features of the new product. This “information gap” often occurs because many PR and marketing people are so concerned about getting their news releases approved by various gatekeepers (legal, HR, sales) that they tend to use boilerplate information about the product and the company. Too often the product is simply described as a new version that “upgrades” or “enhances” the old model.

Tentative buyers don’t care if your new Version 3.0 replaces your old Version 2.5. They want to know if it will solve their problem. An effective B2B news release not only describes the new product in terms of *what* it does, but also tells **how it solves a particular problem** (e.g. HIPAA breach notification, ICD-10 conversion, inventory management). Ideally, you should use a specific example from a real customer and include facts and figures about the implementation and results.

If you can’t use the customer’s name in your case history, describe the implementation in generic terms (e.g. small community hospital). If you do not have any case history because it is a brand new product and it hasn’t been deployed yet, you can go “under the hood” and explain how unique or innovative features in the new product will work to solve the problem.

After describing your product and the problem in your first paragraph, use the second or third paragraphs to give a capsule description of your company. Describe the markets you serve and give key background information. In the fourth or fifth paragraphs, go into more depth about how your product solves the problem. If possible, use specific examples of how the product worked at a customer facility, giving time frames and cost savings.

4. Use push to get pull.

While there are a number of different definitions of “push” and “pull” marketing, in the context of news release distribution it refers to whether a vendor is pushing out content to customers (e.g. email) or having customers pull it from them via search engine listings. For example, if a customer has decided to purchase asset-tracking software, they will *pull* information from companies by using that term in a search engine.

Ironically, one of the best ways to get positioned for **pull marketing**, getting high Google search rankings, is to use **push marketing**. Specifically, paying for news release distribution on one of the major paid wire services (PR Newswire, Business Wire, Marketwire) will generally give you a high rank in Google or Bing; spiders give news wire stories high marks because they appear on so many different web sites.

In addition to enabling high search engine rankings, the paid PR wires also create other forms of pull marketing. Although they are best known for providing dedicated feeds to mainstream media including Reuters, Bloomberg and Dow Jones, they also offer (for an extra price) posting to portals, databases, information services, industry specific web sites and subscription features such as RSS, Twitter and Facebook users. This offers the opportunity for readers to find your company in many other ways.

Need to keep costs down? While the premium, national distribution lists cost about \$1,000 per release, a single region (e.g. New York, California), costs less than \$300. With regional distribution, you get most of the features of the premium list, including measurement (clicks on hyperlinks, referring URLs) and clipping reports listing the outlets that ran the release.

5. Collect leads by offering more information.

In order to move tentative buyers to engaged buyers, you need to validate your company and your product. While a single news release can be helpful in attracting the attention of prospective buyers, they will want to know more about your company and products than you can provide in a 400-word release.

You can direct buyers to high-value content on your website with a hyperlink. Including hyperlinks of any kind makes sense because links are valued by search engines. Despite this value, a 2010 Business Wire survey found that **only 14% of press release issuers include links** in their documents.

Note that articles in news outlets often include links to other stories on the same topic in the publication. In a similar manner, your new product announcement should link to a page on your company web site that contains more information about the product or the company. This page might contain photos of the product or perhaps an offer to register for a white paper. A recent survey by RainToday.com, “What’s Working in Lead Generation,” found that white papers were one of the top tools in generating new sales leads with 58% of respondents rating them “effective” or “highly effective.”

6. Reach a wide audience with a Google News listing.

Google News is the news aggregation service found in the menu above the search box (along with Images, Video, Maps, and Shopping). It is *much* harder to get listed your news release listed in Google News than in the company’s search engine listings. Virtually any distributed news release or blog posting will get looked at by Google’s search engine spiders and get listed, although it may be ranked so low (e.g. 22,889 out of 22,891) as to be worthless in terms of publicity.

Google News searches 4,500 news sites, generally wire services, online news sites (e.g. *New York Times*) and hundreds of independent web news sites and blogs and newspapers. The spiders, augmented by human readers, then cull out news stories, news releases, research reports and other documents deemed to be newsworthy.

How can you get your news release on Google News? Paying for distribution on a major wire service is an important first step, but not a guarantee. Business Wire reports that most, but not all of the news releases distributed on its service get listed in Google News.

To improve your chances of getting your release included in Google News:

- **Keep your headline between 5 and 25 words;**
- **Write in a journalistic style: who, what, when, why;**
- **Start your release with a three sentence paragraph;**
- **Optimum total length is 250-750 words.**

7. Repurpose company news for trade shows.

Major trade shows offer excellent opportunities to meet reporters and prospective buyers in person. Despite tightened corporate travel budgets, **trade shows and industry conferences remain highly popular**, particularly in the healthcare industry. For example, in 2010, the annual Health Information and Management Systems Society conference drew a record 28,000 visitors and 934 exhibiting companies.

Some companies deliberately time new product announcements to take advantage of the large press attention available at major conferences. Typically, the public relations opportunities include buyer's guides, special issues of trade publications, exclusive meetings with reporters and real-time coverage on daily blog reports. Typically, exhibitors will get access to the conference media room, providing an excellent way to distribute news releases and meet reporters.

At large trade shows with many exhibitors, reporters will be very busy. For results, you should contact key reporters at least 30-60 days in advance and book a specific time to meet in the media room or at your exhibit booth. Be sure to have your CEO or other senior executive available. Many reporters will decline to talk to marketing VPs or product managers.

If you are exhibiting but don't have a new product to debut at the show, you should still reach out to news media by creating materials specifically for the show. You can draw on your existing news releases to prepare technology backgrounders and company overviews. You should also have updated fact sheets, executive bios and product illustrations available on paper and in portable media (e.g. jump drive) to give to reporters.

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