

CATO'S SUCCESS RULES FOR YOUR ON-LINE NEWS RELEASES!

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News releases appearing on the “digital information highway” are one of the most effective ways for driving potential clients to your Web Site, newsletter, e-zine, conference, etc. This can result in major publicity exposure for those who sell insurance or provide other financial products and services -- at little cost, effort, time, or trouble for you. This can help you inform and educate prospects about the benefits of your financial planning services. Remember to add on-line news releases to your marketing efforts.

Often, after your news release is posted or distributed via the Internet, all or some of you copy may be picked-up by the Internet news networks like *MSN News*, *Yahoo News* or *Google News*. Then in a few days your on-line news release could start to appear in the results of the major search engines. But do not rush into submitting on-line news releases without first paying attention to the following fourteen rules. Many of these rules are loaded with additional tips to further assist you.

Rule Number One -- Do not be a financial planning clown! *Be honest and accurate. Do not lie! Never exaggerate or embellish.* Avoid boasting or appearing pompous. Do not follow the advice of “in-your-face” consultants who urge you to “promise anything to get an account.” Avoid exploiting fears, over-promising, hard sales tactics, and other less than honorable techniques that many self-proclaimed gurus and other consultants highly recommend. Unfortunately, there are so many clowns in financial planning that this is the number one rule by necessity. This is also why

professional journalists remain skeptical or cynical about planners. Imagine having to urge professionals to be honest, stick to the facts, and avoid fluff. In many cases, you are competing with dishonest people in your market.

Rule Number Two -- *Make certain that your on-line release is a news release and not an attempt to get a free advertisement!* Remember, especially if you are creating news, that *your on-line news release must be qualified on an information, news, educational, or entertainment basis.* If possible, attempt to provide content of immediate interest and/or lasting practical value for your intended audience(s). Your excitement does not mean your subject is newsworthy. *Respect the intelligence of your readers.* Do not scream **BUY ME!** or gush with praise about how wonderful you are. Again, do not try to cheat or abuse this opportunity to communicate. *Resist the temptation to give your sale pitch!* You do not want media people to think of you as just another clown among financial advisors or insurance agents.

Rule Number Three -- *Start with a strong beginning!* Your compelling headline and first paragraph should tell as much of your story as possible. The rest of your on-line news release should provide the necessary details. You only have a few seconds to “hook” your reader’s attention. Do not fail to get the reader’s interest by starting weak copy that is dull, confusing, mundane, self-serving, etc.

Rule Number Four -- *Write for one person.* You are not writing for “all you folks out there.” Thus you would never say, “I am sure most of you agree.” Always write as if you are communicating with one person. Enough said about this.

Rule Number Five -- *Never use all upper case letters!* I repeat do not use all capital letters. Not in your headline! Not in your subheads! Not in your body copy! I do not know why some financial planners and insurance agents insist on doing this? Enough said about that.

Rule Number Six -- *Don’t fall in love with what you write!* Even a super-fantastic writer like you can usually benefit from the help of a responsible editor. Cliches never help your case! If you are making obvious writing mistakes then you are not a very effective writer. Unnecessary adjectives, flowery language, cliches, lack of originality, or repeating the same word or words, -- are all

Rule Number Seven -- *Always obtain proper permissions and always indicate that you have proper permissions.* All dispute resolutions favor the other person or source, if you failed to get and display proper permission(s). *Always give proper credit where it belongs.* Do not cheat on

this. *Do not steal other people's words and take credit for them yourself.* Enough said about indicating that you have obtained proper permissions.

Rule Number Eight -- **Do not include hype flags!** This is the mistake that "shoots down" some of the clowns in financial planning. A **hype flag** is anything that challenges the credibility of your press release. An obvious lie is a **hype flag**. Too many exclamation points or exaggerated product or service claims can trigger spam filters to intercept your on-line news release before it reaches its destination or before it is even posted. *You must have credibility.* Suspicions can kill your reputation and your practice.

Rule Number Nine -- *Focus tightly on your one theme.* Stick to your theme. Do not cover seven topics. Give your on-line news release enough thought and preparation to insure that you "stick to your subject." Do not go off into unrelated advocacy, opinions, reporting, self-aggrandizing (a habit of clowns), or enter into any other areas. An editor at the Internet's largest on-line news release wire service told me, "We reject about twenty percent of the submitted news releases from financial planners because of a lack of worthy content."

Rule Number Ten -- *Use your common sense.* This means you should take into consideration such obvious factors as the following: *Make your on-line news release interesting. Don't be overtly self-serving.* Appeal to the reader's self-interest. (If you are announcing a new software program then no one really cares a lot about that! Unless you can quickly reveal the benefits for the reader! If you enjoyed a vacation in Hong Kong then no one really cares about that either. Do not go on-and-on. *Use only the amount of words you need to accomplish the job of our on-line news release. Be simple, clear, easy-to-understand, and brief.* You can always do multiple on-line news releases so do not write a book. It is not necessary to include your life story. (Most likely, readers are not all that interested in your life story.) *Do not strive to impress. Avoid puffery or filler.* Ask yourself "Why should anyone care about what I am writing?" Remember to invite interested people to follow-up in various ways for more free and no-obligation detail.

Rule Number Eleven -- *Use appropriate key words* so your on-line news release will be easy to place in the logical position within the natural search engines results for **Google, Yahoo, MSN**, etc. Your keywords should be obvious and of course they should be appropriate. You can test this by doing a key word search and notice how many Web Sites will be competing for the same key word. Note if the key word is used in the title and if the Web Site(s) have the key word(s) in the domain name. You improve your possibility of getting ranked in the top ten (search engine

results) if you use a key word that is not highly popular, thus the competing Web Sites are less. Your goal is to help cause your on-line new release to be properly indexed.

Rule Number Twelve -- *Create and use an effective headline. Your effective headline is one that attracts attention, creates interest, and (hopefully) stimulates reading of your entire message.* Effectiveness is often increased if your headline can promise something of use, benefit, or other value -- or if your headline asks an appropriate question (then your message answers that question for your readers). *Of course your key word(s) should be used in your title.*

Rule Number Thirteen -- Even though you are a financial professional you still do not get to create the rules as you go along. You must “play this game” by the well-established existing rules. This means you are required to *format your on-line news release correctly.* You can’t bully your PR person or Media Advocate into violating these rules and expect to achieve the results you want. *In your on-line news release, always adequately cover the “who, where, what, when, why, and how” aspects of your subject. Spell correctly. Structure sentences properly. Use good word choices. Flow logically. Avoid grammatical errors.* This is not rocket science. *Proof read your copy before you send it. Do not compose your copy as you are submitting it!*

Rule Number Fourteen -- *Use a professional on-line news release service.* Using a less than professional on-line news release service can cost you more in initial expense and lost opportunities to attract more business. There are services that will submit your on-line news release for no cost to you. Never pay a large fee for having someone submit your on-line news release for you. Paying a modest service fee to established on-line news release services can generally provide you better results (wider coverage with more hits or responses) and fewer problems. On-line news release services I recommend include <http://www.webwire.com/default.asp> and <http://prwire.com/> and <http://www.24-7pressrelease.com/> and <http://www.pressbox.co.uk/index.html> plus there are others. Any financial professional who follows the fourteen rules should be able to more effectively use on-line news releases.

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