

DEVELOPING A PRESS RELEASE FOR PROMOTING THE WORK OF THE COURTS

The public image of courts matter

In today's world, more than ever, "perception is reality"- the way people perceive your institution, that's the way you are indeed. You might do the best job, but if the people do not trust you, it all falls apart. Image is the mental picture that people have of an organization. Building positive public image is key for organization's success. It is even more important when you spend taxpayers' money. These are institutions of public character and the community has a right to know how work is performed. Courts must be concerned about their image and invest in developing a positive reputation for their work, thus building public trust and confidence.

Being proactive

It is clear that the public as well as the media are interested in what courts are doing. Why shouldn't the courts be the ones that inform the public about court issues and concerns? Court silence in the face of media inquiries, only serve to permit the critics of the judiciary to define, often inaccurately, the position of judges and the judicial branch. Proactiveness is the "formula" for implementation of the principles of openness, transparency and accountability in the courts. Public information officers in the courts should step up and keep the public informed on the court's work, as well as the challenges they face providing timely and fair justice.

This brochure will explore the PRESS RELEASE, one of the public relations tools you might use to help you build a good public image of your court.

WHAT IS A PRESS RELEASE?

Press release is a simple tool used to convey to the media, new and important information. It is an official written statement that is sent to the media to be publicized.

Press release is neither an announcement nor letter. It is an article, written in third person, that seeks to demonstrate to an editor or reporter the newsworthiness of a particular person, event, service or product.

The press release should make the journalist interested in your story and then make him/her want to publish it in the media. This has various benefits – positive exposure for your court and its work will, the journalist will have a good story, and lastly, the citizens will be informed.

The press release will help you:

- Be present in the public
- Inform the public on the quality of your court's work
- Demonstrate proactive attitude
- Demonstrate transparency
- Build a positive image of your court

ON WHAT OCCASIONS SHOULD A PRESS –RELEASE BE WRITTEN?

- During the beginning or end of an event, activity, project, program
- Information on results achieved in court's work
- Presenting an opinion, position, comment, argument for socially significant event
- Forecasts for development and recommendations for actions
- Correcting incorrect information

For example: new courtroom, new electronic services offered by the court, complete automation of the court, public satisfaction from the work of the court, appointment of new judges, results in fighting case backlog, opinion on new laws affecting the judiciary, reforms of the judiciary, forecast on the court budget, reaction on articles in the media, etc.

HOW TO WRITE A PRESS -RELEASE?

Use a journalist style. Imagine a short newspaper article - that's how your press release should look. It will help you attract journalist's attention and increases the chances that your text will be originally portrayed in the actual article of the journalist.

Best rule to follow: Keep it short and simple!

BEFORE YOU START WRITING ASK YOURSELF:

- Is my information newsworthy? (if the answer is NO, stop here and continue when you have something important to share with the public)
- Why do I want to write it?
- What audience do I address to?
- What do I want the public to understand (do) with this press release?
- What are the basic facts/information that I wish to convey?

THE STRUCTURE:

The press release has a form of inverted pyramid - what is the most important goes first.

-TITLE - it has to attract the reader and also provide a summary of the article. Be creative! Do not send press releases without titles.

For example:

Increased Public Users' Satisfaction in the Basic Court XY

New Look of the Basic Court XY

Basic Court XY Works Effectively

Basic Court XY Resolved All Backlog Cases

-DATE - when you send the press release

The LEAD is the first paragraph that is supposed to capture the attention of the audience and set the tone for the rest of the article. The LEAD includes:

- WHO
- WHEN
- WHAT
- WHERE
- WHY

For example:

70 percent of the court users of the Basic Court XY think that the court works effectively. This was shown by the results of the public users' satisfaction survey conducted on March 30 in the Basic Court XY, in cooperation with USAID.

-Next comes the BODY, which includes explanations on the lead, quotes, statistics, history or other relevant details.

-Include quotes is very important. People are interested in real-life stories, your quote will give human touch to your press release. Be sure that you include the full name and title of the person who contributed a quote.

For example: *"We are very proud that the citizens' trust in our effectiveness continuously grows. Since the first survey, conducted in March 2005, the trust increased for 20 percent"-says Judge XY, Public Information Officer of the court.*

The survey is conducted periodically and aims to assess court users' opinion on the court's performance, as well as to give directions for improving the quality of the services. The last survey included 254 court users.

At the end, you include SUPPORTING INFORMATION, such as: information on your court, whom to contact for more details, etc.

For example:

For more details on the survey and the work of the Basic Court XY, contact Judge XY, Public Information Officer of the court.

At the end of the press-release, write (THE END). Include your full contact details (name, title, address, e-mail, telephone).

-PHOTOS-If you have, include 1-2 good-quality action photos or mention the photo opportunities.

THINGS TO BEAR ON MIND WHILE WRITING THE PRESS RELEASE

- Determine the focus or the angle of your story-this should be ONE thing
- The first ten words have to be effective
- Use facts
- Be sure to remain objective, without influences
- Use common, understandable language, avoid legal, technical or "strange" language
- Check the grammar
- Be concise

- Use short sentences
- One page is enough
- Choose the right timing – when the topic is hot, not weeks after

DISTRIBUTION OF THE PRESS RELEASE

You can choose to send the press release by fax, e-mail, or even by regular mail. No matter what you decide, the main issue is to make it fast and efficient. Your press release needs to reach the right media and the right journalist that covers the judiciary-related topics. To identify them, analyze the media and prepare a list of media for your use. After you have sent the press release, call to check. You will make sure it reached the journalist and you will show interest, which can further develop your relationships with the journalist for mutual benefit.

SAMPLE OF PRESS RELEASE



Basic Court Q

PRESS RELEASE

Skopje, April 5, 2009

Contact:
Judge XY, PIO
Tel: 2222 222
E-mail: judge@court.com.mk

Increased public users' satisfaction in the Basic Court XY

70 percent of the court users of the Basic Court Q think that the court works effectively. This was shown by the results of the public users' satisfaction survey conducted on March 30 in the Basic Court Q, in cooperation with USAID.

"We are very proud that the citizens' trust in our effectiveness continuously grows. Since the first survey, conducted in March 2005, the trust increased for 20 percent"-says Judge ZZ, President of the Basic Court Q.

The survey is conducted periodically and aims to assess court users' opinion on the court's performance, as well as to give directions for improving the quality of the services. The last survey included 254 court users.

For more details on the survey and the work of the Basic Court Q, contact Judge XY, Public Information Officer of the court.

(end)

Attachment: Photo of the Survey conducted in Basic Court Q

