

# Quick Tips for Building Online Newsrooms

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The importance of the online newsroom is hard to overstate. It is the primary 24-hour, 365-day-a-year source that reporters can use to tell your company's story. Why risk making it anything but the easiest, and most accurate source to use?

There are two keys to building online newsrooms. Make them fast and make them accurate. It is not easy to do either. The following recommendations are based on surfing thousands of Web pages and looking at dozens of newsrooms. Some recommendations are for large, high-volume newsrooms. Others, any organization can put into effect.

**Tip 1: Make it easy to find.** It is irksome to wade through drop-down menus looking for the newsroom. Make the news hyperlink large and prominent on the home page. No one should spend five seconds to find it.

**Tip 2: Avoid passwords.** Some corporate PR departments assign IDs and passwords to media to find out who uses the newsroom. While this helps corporate PR, it can annoy reporters who have to remember yet another password and can inadvertently lock themselves away from needed information just when they need them.

**Tip 3: Make contact information easy to find.** Build a page that lists key contacts within the PR department for reporters' queries. List the beats that each contact covers, the individual's phone and e-mail. Place the contact page prominently in the one-screen index – the first page that a reporter comes to.

**Tip 4: Build a one-screen index to news and information.** When a reporter enters the newsroom, all information that he or

she might be seeking should be indexed simply and clearly on one screen that the reporter does not have to scroll. The topic headers should be hyperlinks to information stored elsewhere. The one-screen index should be much like a site map. Indexing should be titled logically -- financial information, company information, calendar of activities, product and service information. Beneath these titles should be key sub-heads like earnings releases, annual reports, product descriptions, etc.

**Tip 5: Sub-index chronologically.** Place new information first and old information last on every page. It makes no sense to have a reporter scroll down the page to get the latest quarterly earnings news release.

**Tip 6: Cross-index.** Much news cuts across an organization and has implications in several parts of it. Place hyperlinks to material throughout the newsroom as appropriate. Don't expect a reporter to intuit where you have placed information.

**Tip 7: Package information together:** Place all information about a product or service under a header for that product or service. This can be done by sub-indexing links to descriptions, brochures, photos, logos, news releases, multimedia, videos, sound files, comparison tables and features/functions lists. If you want, make this a media kit of Adobe pdf files that preserve formatting of original brochures. Do the same for corporate information. The CEO's bio should be packaged with authorized photos and other information, such as membership on the board of directors, memberships on other corporate boards, etc. Division listings should include all information related to that division, including company releases that affected that division.

**Tip 8: Use a good search engine.** The search engine should index the entire Web site and not just the newsroom because reporters may wish to see what has been said about a topic elsewhere.

**Tip 9: Accuracy, accuracy, accuracy.** Update the newsroom daily. Post press releases as they are distributed. Maintain a calendar of company activities that might interest reporters – seminars, trade shows, teleconferences – and revise the calendar as events occur. Delete outdated product/service material and replace it with revised material the instant it is released.

**Tip 10: Assign a newsroom editor.** Assign one person in the corporate PR department to perform daily newsroom maintenance. This person should have direct access to post and update information without having to negotiate with the Webmaster. The newsroom editor should have the same deadline mentality that a wire service reporter has.

**Tip 11: Ask for feedback.** Even with aggressive newsroom updating and careful design for usability, there are times when reporters just can't find information easily. Place a contact line to the newsroom editor on every newsroom page, so reporters can vent their annoyances directly and the newsroom editor can provide fast relief.

**Tip 12: Let reporters know what you have:** E-mail quarterly a list of materials on the newsroom site to reporters who cover the organization. This serves as a reminder and can help educate them as well about where to get company information. The e-mail should also include a question of what the reporter might like to have in the newsroom.

**Tip 13: Measure everything.** Track access to newsroom pages and analyze logs of site visits and times. There are plenty of tools that make this easily doable. The newsroom editor should know as

much about how the newsroom is used as who uses it.

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*Jim Horton, conceived, developed and runs [www.online-pr.com](http://www.online-pr.com), a resource site for PR practitioners.*