

Vault University: What Goes Into An Author Press Kit

This document is part of the Author Platform/Book Promotion curriculum offered by Vault University at <http://vaultu.publetariat.com>, and was authored by April L. Hamilton.

INTRODUCTION

A press kit is a collection of information about you and your work, intended to cast both in the most positive, interesting light possible. A press kit intended to promote a book may include one-sheets, press releases, editorial review reprints, article reprints (articles written *about* or *by* you), an enlarged copy of the book cover printed on glossy paper stock, promotional giveaways (e.g., bookmarks, pencils, mugs, etc. with the name of the book printed on them), and/or a printed excerpt from the book. It will be up to you to decide which items make the most sense for you to include in your own press kits, based on your available resources and the intended recipient. Some of the items are self-explanatory; the others are covered in more detail below.

WHY BOTHER WITH PRESS KITS?

When a mainstream author with a large marketing budget has a new book to promote, a press kit will be sent, along with a review copy of the book, to every major media outlet in an effort to generate buzz and editorial reviews. This approach would be a huge waste for an indie author, since the great majority of mainstream media outlets won't even consider reviewing your book or publicizing its author. Nevertheless, a targeted press kit will come in handy when you line up a review, article or interview because it cuts down on the interviewer/journalist's work by providing a stack of reference material, quotes, etc. about you and your work. Sending a press kit in advance allows you to influence the information that will be served up for public consumption.

PRESS KIT PACKAGING

Be careful not to overstuff your press kits. Keep them specific, to the extent possible, and include only the most relevant and recent items. You may have accumulated thirty press releases over the past few years, but that doesn't mean you should include all of them. Remember to tailor each press kit to the wants and needs of the recipient, to provide only the most useful or desirable content. You don't want the recipient to open up your kit and feel so overwhelmed by the sheer volume of it that she tosses it directly into the recycle bin.

As a rule of thumb, you can assume a basic press kit will include your author one-sheet, a one-sheet for your most recent book in print, your most recent press release (or two, if both are dated within the past 6 months), and if desired, one promotional item. Article reprints and book

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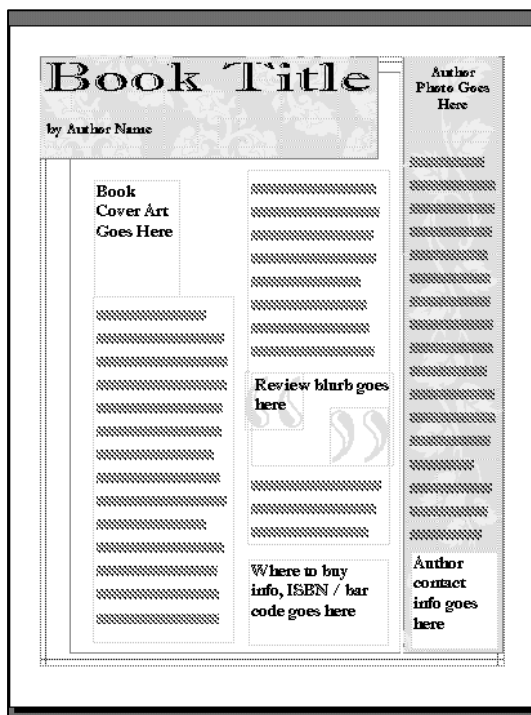
excerpts can be included if the recipient has expressed specific interest in them, but should otherwise be left out because they most likely won't be read anyway.

The One-Sheet

A "one-sheet" is a single sheet of paper, printed on one side only, that summarizes a person, product or service for marketing purposes. The one-sheet is the backbone of a press kit, so if you're going to send out press kits, read this section carefully.

You'll need some time and basic computer skills to create your own one-sheets, more advanced skills if you want to do anything fancy, but the only expense involved is for paper and ink when you print them.

In terms of layout there are no hard-and-fast rules, but it's common practice to position text and pictures in the same way typically seen in newsletters. The content depends on what you're promoting. A one-sheet can be used to promote you as an author in the general sense, or as a promotional tool for an individual book you've published. It's a good idea to create a separate one-sheet for each of your books and one more for you as an author. Don't use one-sheets to publicize publication of a poem, a piece of short fiction or the like, as there's not enough to say about such a piece to fill out a whole one-sheet.



The example at left is a dummy one-sheet for promotion of a specific book, and it was created using a newsletter template in Microsoft Publisher. Microsoft Word and most other word processing programs also have newsletter templates you can use as a starting point, and any desktop publishing program will have such templates as well.

The book's title and author's name appear in the large block at the top left of the page. An image of the book's cover would be inserted below the title block, followed by a large text block about the book. The large text block will generally contain the same text as your book cover jacket copy, and if there's room, other promotional details such as

review blurbs, available sales figures, etc. One review blurb can be highlighted in the large text block, or if you don't have review blurbs yet, you can quote your best line from the jacket copy.

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Information about where to buy the book, and if desired, a copy of your ISBN bar code and number, appear in a separate block at the end of the large text block. The ISBN bar code is there for retailers who want to order your book in quantities for resale. Even if you don't intend to send one-sheets to booksellers, remember that you want your one-sheets to look every bit as legitimate as those prepared by professional publicists, so keeping the ISBN block is a good idea if there's any way you can manage it. If you have a scanner and graphics editor program, you can capture an image of the ISBN barcode by scanning it off your book cover, then trimming the image and saving the file as a .jpg or .gif image on your computer. Finally, you can insert the image into your one-sheet the same as you would with any other image. To the right of the dummy one-sheet is a sidebar block for the author's biography, with the author's photo at the top, brief biography in the middle, and contact/website information at the bottom.

The same basic layout can be used for a one-sheet intended to promote an author in general, not a specific book, by reversing the content and eliminating the ISBN/where to buy block. In that case, you'd use the large text block at the left to provide a more detailed author biography and the sidebar to list some titles of your published work (books, short stories, articles, etc.). The picture above the large text block would be your author photo, and the one above the sidebar would be eliminated.

You can get a little creative with color and fonts in your one-sheet, but don't go crazy. The purpose of your one-sheet is not to dazzle the viewer with your awesome artistic skills, but to clearly, concisely describe yourself or your book. Resist the urge to insert a bunch of clip art on the page, and remember to stick with a consistent, 'signature look' across all your promotional materials.

There's a general rule of three in graphic art: no more than three different fonts or three different color elements should be used on the same page. Since you should already be working with a single, signature font, limit yourself to fonts from the same font family, or at least fonts that are very similar in appearance to your signature font. Try using your signature font formatted in two or three different ways (i.e., italicized, different sizes, shadowed, embossed, etc.). With respect to color elements, such as the watermarks in the dummy one-sheet, it's safest to limit yourself to just one color. If you want to go with more than one color, choose complementary colors (opposites on the color wheel, i.e., yellow and purple) or different shades of the same color (i.e., sky blue, denim blue, navy blue, etc), again, in keeping with your signature look.

When you find a layout you like, stick with that layout for all your one-sheets. Remember: consistency is key to your marketing success.

Author Photo

An author photo is needed not only for one-sheets in your press kit, but pretty much anywhere you want or need your likeness to appear: flyers, book covers, website, blog, online profiles, etc. It's a good idea to get one picture you're happy with and use it for everything, as most well-known, mainstream authors do. This lends that all-important consistency to your promotional efforts and helps to establish your likeness as a recognizable presence in readers' minds.

You need to feel comfortable before the camera to take a good photo. A self-conscious author is a nervous author, and not likely to take a good picture. Try to arrange to have your author photo taken, whether by a professional photographer or a friend, at a time when you'll be free from other worries and distractions.

If you have some skills with a digital camera and know how to use photo editing software, you can go totally DIY, for free. So long as you've got a mirror in a room with good lighting, or know how to use your digital camera's timer function, you can even take the picture yourself. Next, load the photo to your computer, crop it, adjust its color and contrast settings, then save it in various formats for use online and in print. See your photo or graphics editor user manual or help files for more detailed instructions on how to do these things in your specific program. You can get a friend or family member to help with taking the picture or editing it also. Remember to save a smaller, 'compressed' version for use online, in .jpg or .gif format, with a file size of no more than 100KB. This is usually offered as a "Save As" option in photo and graphics editor programs (e.g., "Save A Copy For Email/Web").

If you're not so strong in the camera or photo editing areas, and you don't have any friends or family to help, you will have to pay a professional photographer to take the picture for you. Even so, it doesn't have to cost a fortune. Sears, JC Penney, and even WalMart have portrait services at affordable prices. At the other end of the pricing scale are boutique photographers, whose services can run into the thousands of dollars.

As you make your calls to get pricing information, make sure the photographer or studio will provide a copy of the portrait in digital format (.jpg or .gif file provided on a CD, DVD or via email). Also ensure the photographer or studio will provide a 'compressed' copy of your chosen pose for use on web pages: a smaller version of the picture in a .jpg or .gif file no larger than 100KB.

If you're paying for the photos, go through your books and find an appealing photo of an author to show the photographer, to give him or her some idea of the look and pose you're going for. This will save time and money on rejected poses later.

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One last thing...here's a tip I've heard for anyone who worries about the "wattle" effect (loose neck skin) in a portrait. Try posing with your chin on your hands, or with one fist supporting your chin or jaw, so that your hands or arm conceal your neck.

Press Releases

Press releases add information about your recent activities and accolades to the press kit, and can also be featured on your author website. A press release is an announcement distributed to media outlets as a means of quickly passing along information from a single, controlled channel. There's a high variability in cost where press release distribution is concerned: you can use a free distribution service or a paid service.

Tour dates, airline luggage restrictions, CEO hirings and firings, celebrity child adoptions, corporate bankruptcies, and much, much more come to the public's attention via press releases. Those deemed most newsworthy get 'picked up' by the Associated Press (AP), and from there are reported in newspapers, magazines and on websites all over the world.

Press releases can be an easy, low-cost way to publicize your work, but it takes confidence and above-average written communication skills to craft a good one. You may write amazing prose, but the type of writing called for in this instance is more journalistic and on the face of it, there's nothing very newsworthy about books or authors. Books are written and published every day, there's nothing Earth-shattering, nor even interesting, about that.

For an author, press release success requires an angle: you must be saying something interesting, relevant, surprising or even shocking in your press release if you want any news outlets to report on it. This doesn't mean you should lie or fill your press release with empty hype, however. In fact, doing so will not only *not* help with your publicity campaign, it will damage your credibility and make it that much harder to get any press coverage in the future. Rather, you must wait until you've got something genuinely interesting, relevant, surprising or shocking to say about yourself or your book. Don't worry, this isn't as hopeless as it sounds.

There are five main junctures at which it's common to put out a press release about a book: when the publishing contract is signed, when the book is published, when there are impressive sales figures to report, when the book or author wins an award, and when the book or author does something interesting. As an indie author you will lose out on juncture #1 because there are no contracts involved in the publication of your books, but the other four junctures are wide open to you. The 'book is published' press release doesn't require further clarification, but the last three do.

The Impressive Sales Press Release

Sales figures on indie books are typically modest at best, nonexistent at worst. However, if your book is being sold by Amazon.com, impressive sales figures aren't entirely out of reach. Amazon lists its books under hundreds of categories, and maintains 'bestseller' lists in every one of those categories, constantly updating sales rankings as books are sold. While it may be absolute pie in the sky for you to think your indie book will make the New York Times bestseller list, it's not all that farfetched to imagine your book earning a slot in the top 100 of one of Amazon's many specific book categories. The publishing industry literati are cognizant of the fact that Amazon's bestseller lists are very specific, and therefore being #1 in one of those specific categories is a far cry from being #1 on the New York Times bestseller list for overall fiction or nonfiction, but this isn't so apparent to the general public.

Consider a novel ranked at #778,432 in overall sales of books at Amazon, which is nothing to merit a press release. Let's say that in the Kindle store it's ranked considerably higher in overall book sales, at #23,039; this is still nothing to brag about. However, let's say that in the 'Supernatural Thriller' category of the Kindle store, it's ranked #10.

This is an opportunity to trumpet your success. It's newsworthy when any book gets up into the top 10 on bestseller lists, but even more so for an indie book because indie books have a notorious reputation for slow sales and difficulty in reaching an audience—a reputation that persists despite the fact that plenty of indie books are doing just fine. Any indie book that makes it into an Amazon top 10 bestseller list is deemed exceptional, and its presence in that list is likewise deemed newsworthy. You can check the current rank of your book in different Amazon categories right on its product page on the Amazon site. If your book is ranked in any category, as of this writing that information will appear on your book's product page in the Product Details section. Anytime you notice your book has sold five or more copies in a single day, it's worth checking to see if those sales have driven your book up in the ranks.

If it's possible for you to work in some kind of surprising or interesting angle that makes the sales figure even more impressive, so much the better. For example, you might report that the manuscript had advanced no further than the semifinal round in a contest, or was rejected by a major publisher, yet went on to become an Amazon #10 bestseller after you published it independently.

Obviously, in order to take advantage of Amazon sales rankings your book must be available for sale on Amazon.com. Also, as you've no doubt guessed, the more categories in which your book

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is listed, the more chances you have at hitting the upper reaches of one or more Amazon bestseller lists.

When adding your book to Amazon's sales listings, be sure to list it under as many categories as you reasonably can, up to the limit of categories you're allowed. "Reasonably can" is a phrase that's open to interpretation, but avoid stretching the truth too far. You must balance your desire for more category listings against the risk of alienating readers who could end up buying your book under false pretenses—and may never forgive you for it.

When publishing for the Kindle, adding your book to categories is all part of the publication process. If you've published your trade paperbacks through an outlet such as CreateSpace, Lightning Source, Lulu, etc., the publisher will generally ask you to specify listing categories before they submit the title for sale on Amazon.

The Award Winner Press Release

This one is fairly self-explanatory, but it's worth mentioning that the award ought to be directly related to your writing. In other words, if your book wins the "Tri-County Women In Love" award for excellence in Romance books, go right ahead and whip out a press release. Likewise, if you win a "Community Mentor" award for your volunteer work teaching creative writing to disadvantaged kids, because the award is directly related to your involvement in writing this is also worthy of a press release. However, if you win the "Cub Scout Den Leader of the Year" award, unless your books are about Scouting, there's no obvious relationship between the award and your writing and no justification for a press release.

The 'Something Interesting' Press Release

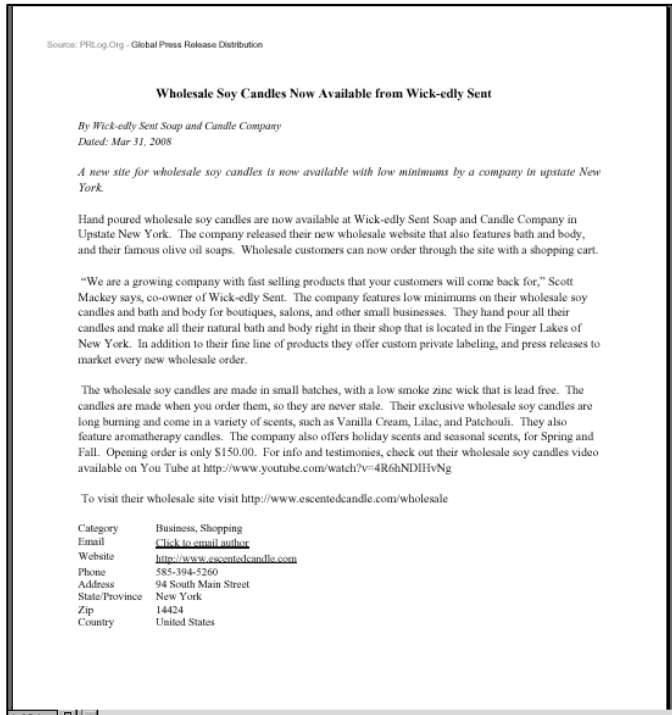
You can have a 'something interesting' press release anytime you want: just do something interesting! This is the sort of thing which, in the mainstream media, is commonly known as a "publicity stunt," but it doesn't have to be anything as obvious (or expensive) as a staged Martian invasion or pie-eating contest.

Many of the promotional activities covered in these lessons, such as speaking engagements, book signings and interviews are interesting enough to warrant press release coverage. Volunteerism related to literacy, involvement in community activities related to the subject matter of your book, and participation in library or book fair events are just a few of the many other opportunities.

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Anatomy Of A Press Release

Acceptable press release format is standardized, and fixed in terms of layout. A sample press release is shown here to illustrate. At the top left, the source of the press release is listed.



Beneath that is the press release headline, followed by the author name and date. Next comes an optional sub-headline, in italics. Beneath that is the main body of the press release. While this isn't shown in the sample, the release may also include a final paragraph with a brief description of the company or person about whose product or activity the press release is written.

Contact details are listed at the bottom, so that anyone who would like to contact you for more information can easily do so.

Traditionally, a legend of "<END>" or three pound signs ("###") is inserted at the bottom to indicate the end of the transmission, a holdover from the days of teletype machines, but this is becoming less common.

You can find many, many more examples online by doing an internet search for "press release", or clicking the "news" link at any major corporation's website.

Source, Byline And Contact

By default, the source, byline name (the name listed for "By:") and contact for the press release will be you. While having a source, author and contact name other than your own on a press release is desirable, since it won't be so obvious you're tooting your own horn, do not make up a name just for this purpose. Remember that the press release is supposed to be a reliable source of information, and therefore the source, author and contact person must be real, accessible entities.

If you write your books under a pen name this is a no-brainer because your press releases about Joe Pen Name can be written by you under your real name. If not, an easy way to get a legitimate source, byline and contact other than your own name is to have someone else publish

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your press release. Consider swapping press release duties with a writer friend; not only will each of you get a legitimate source/byline/contact name different from your own, you may find it's easier to write about someone else than it would be to write about yourself.

If you can't do press release swaps, another option is to go with a different source and/or byline name while still keeping your own name as the contact person. When a press release is published by a distribution company, that company's name is the source of the press release. Free and low-cost online press release distribution services are covered in more detail in the Distributing Your Press Releases section, which follows below.

As for byline, if your website or blog has a name other than your author name, you can use the name of the website/blog as the byline on two conditions: first, you must post the press release at the byline website/blog when it's published, and second, you still must provide your real name and details in the "Contact" section. Of course, if you've formed your own imprint you can publish press releases under the imprint name.

Don't overthink the source/byline/contact stuff, though. If the content of your press release is newsworthy and interesting, so long as the source/byline/contact information is legitimate, it won't matter much that you wrote it yourself. Your goal is to drive traffic to your website, blog or event with the ultimate purpose of selling books, not to convince the general public that you've got a ton of money to spend on publicity. Listing your own name for source/byline/contact won't kill the credibility of your press releases, but sales hype or dishonesty will.

Content Of A Press Release

While the press release is a promotional tool, it should not read like sales copy. You're writing an announcement, conveying factual information that your intended audience would want to know regardless of whether or not it helps you sell books. If you follow the guidelines already given for the appropriate timing of press releases, you should have no trouble avoiding the dreaded, baldfaced sales pitch in press release clothing because you won't be writing a press release unless you've got something newsworthy to write about. Still, you need to avoid the hard sell. Consider the following two examples.

GALE ADAMS THRILLS IN NEW THRILLER

Don't start reading *Mercy Me*, author Gale Adams' terrific new book, until you're ready to stay up all night with the lights on! In this fact-based thriller, a serial killer is on the loose and private investigator Caitlin McElroy has reason to believe a modern-day Dr. Frankenstein is at work in her sleepy New England town

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of Cordley. As tensions and suspicions divide the once close-knit community, McElroy finds facts and evidence piling up against the one person no one else would ever suspect...

AUTHOR GALE ADAMS REVISITS “CORDLEY FRANKENSTEIN” CASE

Thirty-seven years ago a serial killer terrorized the small New England town of Cordley, abducting a dozen citizens in as many weeks. The killer’s basement charnel house, where he dismembered and re-assembled the bodies of his victims, was eventually discovered, but no charges were ever brought in the bizarre case. Based on newly-discovered evidence and painstaking research, author Gale Adams advances a shocking and plausible theory in her new book, *Mercy Me...*

The first example reads like jacket copy, whereas the second could pass for a news item. The book sales pitch couldn’t be any more obvious in the first example, but in the second the book-promotion aspect of the release seems almost incidental, with the primary focus given over to re-examination of an unsolved murder case.

When you write a press release, try to get into the third-person mindset of a reporter. Identify the most newsworthy aspect of your press release and focus on that. Bring in additional facts and quotations only in support of the main focus. If you don’t have quotes from outside sources, “interview” yourself.

Instead of writing, “As a former resident of Cordley, Adams had long been troubled by the Frankenstein case and was even acquainted with one of the victims,” consider, “Asked why she chose to write about this particular case, Adams replied, “I lived in Cordley at the time the murders took place, and I was even acquainted with one of the victims. The affected families never got any closure or justice, and I wanted to do something about it.”” Quotes are a good way to keep an active voice in the narrative while revealing more about yourself.

Distributing Your Press Releases

The easiest way to distribute your press releases is through a service. An internet search on “press release” will turn up many such services, and two that distribute online, at no charge, are www.prlog.org and www.openpr.com. You can go to either site and enter your press release information online, review it in a print-preview mode, and then release it to all the major online media outlets (i.e., Google News, Yahoo!, etc.). At the prlog site, you can even sign up for your own, free ‘press room’, where you can keep track of all your press releases from a single location.

Even if you use an online distribution service, you should still prepare your press release in advance. This allows you to spend as much time as you like writing and revising the release

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before publishing it, and also gives you an original version for archive purposes. When you're ready to submit, all you need do is copy and paste from your saved file.

The alternative to a distribution service is good old-fashioned elbow grease: look up the fax numbers of all the media outlets you'd like to hit and fax your press release to each of them. The term "media outlets" includes newspapers, magazines, radio stations, TV shows and websites. You can find their fax numbers by looking them up online and clicking the "contact" link on each website. You can also fax your press releases to The Associated Press, which is the granddaddy of all news outlets. Go to <http://www.ap.org> and click the "Contact AP" link. You'll be taken to a page where you can look up contact information for the bureau office closest to you.

The other materials that may be included in a press kit, such as a printed excerpt from the book, editorial review reprints (reviews of your book written by professional book reviewers or book bloggers), article reprints (articles written *about* or *by* you), an enlarged copy of the book cover printed on glossy paper stock and promotional giveaways, are fairly self-explanatory.

If you found this document via a link outside of Vault U...

This document is just one *part* of a full lesson about book and author promotion, and is part of the Author Platform/Book Promotion curriculum on the [Vault University](http://vaultu.publetariat.com) site. Vault U. also offers a Publishing curriculum. A new lesson is released in each curriculum every month, and enrollment in either curriculum is just \$5 per month, with no long term commitment. Enrolled students can post questions to, and discuss lessons with, Vault U. instructors on the Vault U. site. If you've found this lesson informative, please consider enrolling in Vault U.