How to be a Kick-Butt Publicity Hound
Four keys to Success

• Understand what’s newsworthy
• Understand basic formats, and genres
• Understand conventions and grammar of story-telling and framing
• Understand routines, competitive concerns, constraints

3 Ways to Generate Publicity Coverage

• Write materials
• Provide spokesperson, conduct interviews
• Stage an event

Variations on the Theme

Write/Provide Materials

• Offer articles/photos/graphics/columns to publications on an exclusive or special basis.
• Distribute/offer (through a national service) ready-to-reproduce, typeset feature stories to smaller newspapers (mat releases, color pages).
• Produce public service announcements for broadcast, print and outdoor media (not-for-profits organizations)
• Distribute a video news release, audio release to broadcast media.
• Produce your own program, short feature (for cable stations, broadcast media: might also be used as a videobrochure, as program material for schools, clubs, youth groups, etc.)
• Provide products as props for films, TV shows (financial consideration might be requested)

Interviews

• Appear on TV talk show
• Go on radio talk, call-in shows
• Retain a professional spokesperson
• Go on a multi-city media tour
• Hold satellite news conference.

Stage Events

• Hold an educational seminar/program/tour for media
• Offer your facilities as a venue for the production of TV shows, movies, commercials, etc.
• Sponsor, co-sponsor a charitable or other event that will earn recognition for your organization. Consider a major media organization as your co-sponsor.
• Provide products that can be used as prizes at events, seek publicity accordingly.
• Sponsor awards for media coverage of an industry, issue; provide financial support for awards, other projects sponsored by media-related professional organizations.

###
Mainstream Notions of What's Newsworthy

Public Recognition

- Issue Recognition: Is the problem already recognized as an issue or is it relatively unknown?
- Famous Faces: Are faces known to the public involved? How many people? What institutions?
- Trendiness: Is the issue currently fashionable or has it peaked? Is it timely?
- Proximity: How directly will the impact be felt? On individuals? On groups?

Importance

- Power: Does the event/campaign signal a significant power struggle? Does it represent a move by a powerful institution?
- Impact: What impact will the event/campaign (or the issue raised) have? On whom?
- Currency: Is the problem happening now?

Interest

- Good Story: Is the event/campaign packaged with a story line that offers conflict and resolution?
- Human Interest: Are there any appealing characters with whom the audience can identify?
- Memorable Emotions: Does the story transmit feelings, not just ideas?
- Visuals: Are there interesting visuals (dramatic action, good photo opportunities, not just talking heads)?
- Cultural Resonance: Does the event/campaign incorporate broad cultural themes (corruption exposed, little guy beats odds, small town pulls together after tragedy, etc.)
- Fresh Twist: Is the event/campaign different, unusual or funny-something that hasn't been done before?


###
Ideas to Generate News for Your Organization

Thirty-two ways to create news for your organization

1. Tie in with news events of the day.
2. Work with another publicity person.
3. Tie in with a newspaper or other medium on a mutual project.
4. Conduct a poll or survey.
5. Issue a report.

6. Arrange an interview with a celebrity.
7. Take part in a controversy.
8. Arrange for a testimonial.
9. Arrange a speech.
10. Make an analysis or prediction.

11. Form and announce names for committees.
12. Hold an election.
13. Announce an appointment.
15. Issue a summary of facts.

16. Tie in with a holiday.
17. Make a trip.
18. Present an award.
19. Hold a contest.
20. Pass a resolution.

21. Appear before public bodies.
22. Stage a special event.
23. Write a letter.
24. Release a letter you received.
25. Adapt national reports and surveys for local use.

26. Stage a debate.
27. Tie into a well-known week or day.
28. Honor an institution.
29. Organize a tour.
30. Inspect a project.

31. Issue a commendation.
32. Issue a protest.


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A Publicity Materials Checklist

News Releases (General distribution)
- New product, services
- Events sponsored (e.g. fundraisers, tours, open houses, seminars, rallies, awards programs, meal events)
- Observances (anniversaries, etc.)
- Facility openings, relocations, closings
- Personnel changes
- Distributor appointments, changes
- Contracts, grants received, given
- Awards, honors or designations received, given
- Reports issued, research findings
- Position statements
- Gifts, contributions received (not-for-profits)

Feature Stories (Exclusive, special or general distribution)
- Profiles (people, products, companies or causes)
- Round-up, trend stories
- Service features ("how to")
- Case studies
- Signed, first-person experiences, reminiscences
- Op-Ed pieces (signed articles)
- Letters to the editor

Fact Sheets/Background materials
- Key data at-a-glance
- Glossaries
- Directories (key contacts, office list locations, etc.)
- Questions and answers
- Suggested interview questions
- Texts/excerpts of speeches, reports, books, articles

Photos and Captions (Black and white prints, color transparencies, color prints)
- Action photos
- Portraiture (mug/head and shoulder shots, candids)
- Product portraiture, products in use
- Architectural

Graphics
- Logos
- Graphs, charts
- Illustrations

Audio-Visuals
- Video news material (Video news story, b-roll video footage or still slides--accompanied by script, background)
- Audio news material (Script, actualities, recorded story, or background sound--accompanied by script, background)
- Public service announcements (script for announcer, slide to accompany a voice over, recorded audio, or video tape)
Writing a News Release: A Checklist

Challenges of writing publicity material
- Limited news hole
- Alternative viewpoints possible
- Write for many media; editors have different interests, quirks
- Varying news value of items
- Editors' skepticism
- Publicists are responsible for errors, have no editors.

How releases can be used
- As-is (generally limited to routine, noncontroversial news)
- As source of information for a story written by a reporter (can use facts, quotes, background information)
- As the basis for an interview

Format
- 1-2 pages maximum (400-500 words)
- Inverted pyramid format
- Strong lede (5Ws&H: Who, what, when, where, why, how)
- Typewritten, double spaced, one side of sheet
- -more- at bottom of pages; identifier (slug) on subsequent pages
- -30- or ### at end.

Important items to include
- Contact Name and Phone (Be available for follow-up inquiries)
- Release time (Immediate release or embargo with specified time)
- Headline (identifier)
- Dateline (optional; include if location is important)
- Date (possibly serial number, too)

Common Problems
- No news of interest to editor (usually a misdirected release)
- News is buried (often a ploy when news is bad)
- Lead with wrong focus, wordy
- Missing information; fail to anticipate basic questions
- Excessive commercialism (self-laudatory, excessive adjectives)
- Lacks strong angle (Remember key elements of news: Prominence, Drama, Human Interest, Localness, Consequence, Oddity, Topical)

Make your key points
- Near top (first or second paragraph)
- Be sure to include standard (ideal) description of organization
- Work other (positive) points into text
- Avoid overstatement; beware of claims as first, only, unique
- Use quotes to incorporate opinion, subjective ideas, explain rationale for actions. Avoid trite quotes, purge cliches.
- Cite the most appropriate spokesperson for organization
- In case of bad news, stress actions being taken to rectify.
Write like a pro!

- Use clear, concise, vivid language
- Sentences should not exceed 15 words; paragraphs should not exceed 30 words or four typewritten lines
- Follow news style (not advertising style)
- Check for proper grammar, spelling, punctuation
- Provide neat, clean copy
- Distribute on a timely basis, meet deadlines
- Write for the audience, not the client
- Proof, proof, poof!

###
The 7 Deadly Sins of News Releases

The news release is often your only chance to make a great first impression. Publicity Hounds might send dozens of them each year. But so do many other people. That means sloppy, inaccurate, pointless releases are the first to hit the newsroom wastebasket.

To make sure yours isn't one of them, avoid these 7 Deadly Sins:

1. Providing insufficient or wrong information. Particularly telephone numbers. Releases must be complete, accurate and specific.
2. Writing too long. They should be no longer than two pages.
3. Sending it too late. Mail or fax it at least two weeks before an event, preferably three or four.
4. Sending a release with no news value. News is what happens that is different. If it isn't different, it isn't news.
5. Blatant commercialism. Using flowery words and phrases such as "spectacular," "incredible" and "the only one of its kind."
6. Omitting a contact name and phone number. At the top of the first page in the left corner, let editors know who they can call if they have questions.
7. Calling after you send a release. Questions like "Did you get my news release?" or "Do you know when it will be printed?" will brand you as a pest. Don't follow up with a phone call to see if the media got your release, unless you are absolutely sure that someone in the newsroom will check for you. Most reporters and editors don't have time.

• **Bonus Sin**: Using outdated media reference books. Double-check to see if the person to whom you are sending the news release still works there, and that the address is the same. A news release sent to an editor who left the paper ten years ago eventually will be routed to the right person, but they'll think you don't care about the paper or who works there.
Headlines for 'How-to' Articles

Want to write a how-to article but can't come up with a topic? Start by naming the three biggest problems your customers or clients face. You've just come up with three ideas for three different articles. Be sure the topics tie into a service you provide, a product you sell, or a cause or issue you want to promote. Once you've chosen a topic, it's time to select a title. Here's a list of possibilities. Simply fill in the blank, depending on what you've decided to write about.

1. A Part-Timer's Tactics for a Full-Timer's ______________
2. A Quiz: Test Your ______________ Smarts
3. Cash in on ______________ Trends
4. Chasing the Right ______________
5. Cool Tools for Today's ______________
6. Common Errors That Kill ______________
7. Discover the 7 Essential Elements That Guarantee ______________
8. Finding the ______________ That is Uniquely You
9. Good News for ______________
10. How to Bounce Back from ______________
11. How to Get Other People to ______________
12. How to Handle ______________
13. How to Make ______________ Work for You
14. How to Make Your ______________ Dreams Come True
15. How to Turn ______________ into ______________
16. Mastering the Art of ______________
17. No More ______________
18. Part-Time ______________, Full-Time Success
19. Questions and Answers About ______________
20. Straight Talk from a ______________
21. The Great ______________ Dilemma
22. The Most Beginner-Friendly ______________
23. The Last Word on ______________
24. The Amazing Solution for ______________
25. The Best and Worst Ideas for ______________
26. The Complete Guide to ______________
27. The Worst Mistakes You Can Make When ______________
28. Top 10 ______________ Do's and Don'ts
29. What's HOT and NOT in ______________
30. Your Must-Know Guide to ______________
31. ______________ with Pizzazz!
32. ______________ and Grow Rich
33. ______________ on the Cheap
34. 5 Ways to Get More from Your ______________
35. 5 No-Fail Strategies for ______________
36. 7 Secrets to Successful ______________
37. 7 Ways to Keep Your ______________ Dreams Alive
38. 7 Ways to Avoid the Most Deadly ______________ Mistakes
39. 7 Ways to Avoid the Worst ______________ Mistakes
40. 9 Formulas for Fantastic ______________
41. 17 User-Friendly Facts for ______________
42. 15 Tips to Jump-Start Your ______________
43. 11 Questions You Must Ask When You're ______________
44. 16 Tips That Will Make a ______________ Smile
45. 9 Time-Tested Tips for Becoming a ______________
46. 21 Quick ______________ Tips to Use Now
Sending Effective Press Releases

Capturing a publication's attention can be a difficult task. You are competing against a variety of other people, causes and events. To win this competition you must do two things. First, you must gain their interest. Second, you must present your story in a professional manner that will make it easy for them to give you the coverage you desire. Here are some tips to help you accomplish this task.

Know Your Target

Find out who the editor or reporter is for the section you want your release to appear in. Include their name on the release, not just on the envelope.

Pick One Person Per Publication

Once you’ve chosen the appropriate person, stick with them. If the article needs to be passed off to another reporter, the publication will make that decision. If you send your release to more than one person, any problems that develop from duplicate coverage and effort will be blamed on you.

Don’t Just Send, Call

To increase your chances of getting coverage, call the intended recipient before you send the release and call a few days later to make sure they received it. Making first contact by phone will also help you find the appropriate person to send your release to.

Give it Time

Don’t fax a release out the day before an event and expect it to receive coverage. Give the maximum possible amount of time for the publication to decide how they want to cover the story. If you feel the event is so far in the distance that they might forget about it, then simply send another release as the time for the item draws nearer.

Know Your Deadlines

Magazines, even weekly ones, are often planned months in advance. Seasonal events, such as Christmas and Easter, are great examples of this. Christmas issues are frequently developed in the heat of summer. For calendar items, know when the publication's submission deadline is.

Keep it Short and Informative

Reporters and editors are notoriously busy. Most press releases should be kept to one page. Two is acceptable. If they want more information, they’ll ask.

Write it in a News Style

Put the primary information (who, where, what, and when) into the lead (first paragraph), and keep the sales pitch subtle. No exclamation points!!! Use short words and sentences. Make sure what you’re saying is very clear. Many publications will directly reprint a press release, as long as it is written in a professional news style. Buy either the AP Stylebook or the Chicago Manual of Style, and learn the general guidelines for abbreviating words, writing numbers and capitalizing names.
It is Still Better to Mail than to Fax

Almost all publications have fax machines, and a few of them prefer to receive their press releases via fax, but the vast majority still prefer mail and even the ones who like fax will still run mail pieces. You should only fax in a crisis. If a client has somehow been implicated in a devastating event (such as the Jack-in-the-Box meat disaster) then the need to get important information to the press outweighs the nicety of mail. Many news organizations also accept e-mail press releases. You should check with each publication to find out their preferred system for receiving press releases.

Help keep it Together

Always include, at the top corner of every page, a two or three word description of the story, the name and phone number of key contact people (no more than two), the page number (if there is more than one page) and the release date (usually "for immediate release" or "please hold until ??/??/??").

Show and Tell

If you have good photos, send them or include the words "photos available upon request" with your information at the top of the first page. Only send high quality photos, however, and only when they add to your story. Place photos between cardboard when mailing. Don't tape or paper clip the photos or you risk damaging them.

Make it Easy on the Eyes

Use standard 8 1/2"x 11" paper typed on one side only. Never break a paragraph across two pages. Leave wide margins for editors to write notes in. A 1 1/2" or 2" margin on each side is fine. Also, use a standard font; fancy text may look nice, but it is hard to read.

Dress for Success

Don't fold your press release like a letter. You should fold it so that the headline and date will be the first thing the editor or reporter sees upon opening the envelope.

All Good Press Releases Must Come to an End

End a press release with either "###" or "-30-" typed across the center of the page, three lines below the end of your text. If a release has greater than one page, type "-more-", centered at the bottom of the pages preceding the final page.

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The Anatomy of a Press Release

For any organization that has a message or a mission, a press release is one of its most effective and vital means of communication. A nonprofit organization cannot afford to operate without good publicity. No matter how great your cause or worthy your need, if you don't have someone good writing your press releases, you will only achieve nominal success.

In our modern world of multimedia, a newspaper still provides one of the best ways of sending a message out to the general public. You can get your communications published regularly if you write interesting, newsworthy press releases.

Where To Start

If you are simply starting or maintaining a relationship with a newspaper, all you really need to do is call the newspaper to find out who to send a press release to, and what their deadlines are. You can send the release to a particular person, or you can simply send it to the Managing Editor.

Newspapers receive massive amounts of print material daily, and editors have to pick and choose what information, out of the many news wires and press releases they get, is really of interest to their readers. An editor would much rather read a good press release from a nonprofit publicity chairman than get a call and a request for a time-consuming meeting. Although it is always good to develop a rapport with your local press, you need to walk a fine line between making and maintaining a relationship with an editor, and making a pest of yourself. If you send press releases to different types of media, such as radio, you will definitely need to work closely with them and follow-up everything.

Since newspapers work around tight deadlines, you really don't want to abuse a telephone relationship with an editor. Don't call an editor just to find out if your press release arrived; assume it did. If you aren't getting enough press coverage, it probably means your press releases are weak, and you need to work on your writing skills. If you have a last-minute correction, it is certainly appropriate to call the editor or send the changes through FAX.

Newsworthy News

What do you want to publicize? Anything of import to your organization, its members, supporters, beneficiaries, and the general public. Send a press release out when you elect officers, have a fund raiser, or put on a major social gathering or community function. Send out a press release when you know the results of your fund raiser, have a special speaker at a meeting, or decide to begin an exciting new annual event. Be sensitive as to what should or shouldn't be publicized; make sure it is pertinent and timely.

The Style and Presentation

A press release should be typed or word processed on an 8 1/2": x 11 ": paper. Provide wide margins and double-space the copy. White paper is most frequently used, but some publicity people use colored paper or typeface that reflect the colors of their organization or the theme of a particular event. If you have a logo, be sure to use it.

Many newspapers accept FAX press releases. If you mail your release, consider folding the letter with the copy side out, so that as soon as the editor opens the letter he sees who it is from and what it is about. Always send the original press release to an editor, and keep a copy for your organization.
Use letterhead stationery or type the name, address, and telephone number of your organization, single-spaced, in the left margin of the page. This is the source of the press release. Also include the publicist's name and telephone number. This is the contact. If you do use a letterhead, but be sure to remember to include the contact's name and phone number.

The date you are sending the press release can be placed at the left or right margin. Next comes the release date, which tells the editor the general time frame you want the information released. It should be typed in capital letters and placed at the left margin. Most press releases simply say, ":RELEASE IMMEDIATELY," or ":RELEASE AT WILL.": Trust the editor to get the timing right. If you need to promote something that is extremely time-sensitive, write more specific details, such as ":RELEASE JUNE 18, AFTER 10 AM."

It is a good idea to include a suggested headline. Most editors write their own headlines, which are typically created after the graphic artist lays out the copy on the newspaper page and determines how much space can be used for a headline. Although your headline might not be used, it immediately tells the editor, at a glance, what is the most important element of your press release.

The lead is the crux of your message. It is the first sentence, which pulls the reader in, hook, line, and sinker. The lead must be short and succinct, and get the message across in one fell swoop.

For the most part, the only information your press release requires is the lead sentence and one or two additional sentences which fill in the details. This is the body of the press release. If you need to elaborate on an idea, keep it concise. Stay away from lots of superlatives, but try to give it some ":punch.":

Most of the press releases your organization sends will not require photographs. Photographs are used more often in stories that reporters write. If you do need to include a photograph, find out if the newspaper wants a black and white or color photo. In order to print well, a newspaper needs a high-quality photographs. Be sure that every photo you send has a typed caption with appropriate identification information adhered to its back. Do not use a paper clip or staple to attach the photo to the press release; simply put the photo with the press release in an envelope.

A Journalistic Style

A good press release answers the all-important journalistic questions known as the Five W's — Who, What, Where, When, and Why. The press release should also answer the Five W's tagalong — How.

A journalistic style is quite different from most writing styles. In most writing, you slowly develop and describe something that leads you to a particular point or conclusion. Newswriting gets straight to the point, and develops the story ":backwards.": The main point is stated at the beginning, and the rest of the information reveals itself from the most important to the least important.

Choose your words carefully and keep the style simple and direct. The body of the press release should be double-spaced, so that there is room for the editor to edit. If you write a one page press release, at the bottom of the copy add three pound signs (###), the number thirty (-30-), or the word ":end": in capital letters (END). These are abbreviations which signify the conclusion of the press release. If you need to use more than one page, write ":continued": at the bottom of the first page, and on subsequent pages, until you get to the final page.
Double-Check and Reevaluate

When your press release is ready to go, take an extra moment to double-check all facts, dates, names, spelling, and grammar. Reread your press release. Is it informative? Is the information clearly defined? Does it speak to the general public? Does the headline and lead grab you and make you want to find out more?

If you are successful at getting your press releases published, clip and save them in a file. This will provide your organization with a good record of its press coverage and style. If you aren’t successful at getting all of your press releases in print, study and reevaluate those that made the grade and those that didn’t.

Fine tune your next press release. Try to determine if you are sending the type of information that is truly of interest to the public. Work on your writing style and physical presentation. Get input from people within your organization.

Check out some public relations and marketing books from your local library. You might even consider getting a copy of the AP Stylebook, which will help you follow newspaper editorial standards for punctuation, use of upper and lower case, sentence structure, paragraph length, abbreviations, and other requisites.

Share Feedback

Every now and then, it is nice to send a thank-you letter to the editor who places your press releases in the paper. Send a brief note of thanks, and relate any positive feedback you’ve gotten from the exposure, such as increased inquiries, new members, good attendance at certain events, or donations. The size of your organization and its members, supporters, and fund raisers, will grow and progress in proportion to your ability to "get the word out."
Press Release Tips from the Experts

"Don't bury the 'lead' — get to the point. Whatever it is—tell it the first paragraph! Then tell them who you are"

Pat Schultz
Public Relations & Communications
Pat Schultz & Associates
San Francisco CA

"With libraries around the county struggling to stay afloat, it certainly helps to have a passionate belief in the 'product' that you are promoting. That will come through, I think, in anything you do, making it that much more effective. There are two tips that I would like to pass on;

**TIP #1**
When planning programs or events, if you want attention from the press, you need to throw in an element that involves another, often cultural, organization will have increased chances of success because that organization brings with it a built-in following of its own.

**TIP #2**
Direct critical press releases to specific people on your publicity list. Establish a personal relationship with key media people in your area and give them a call to alert them whenever you are sending them something you consider especially important. Freelance writers can be your best allies in placing a story so find out who they are, what they like to write about, and how to reach them."

Lorraine L. Oback
Public Relations/Marketing
San Jose Public Library, CA
"Press releases are best when short. Write economically. But provide points for the reporter to expand on. They like angles. Send promptly. When I say promptly, I mean write it before the event, revise right after and fax within minutes. Attach a more lengthy 'fact sheet' with more details, graphs or tables."

**John Grimm**  
*Library Information Coordinator*  
*San Bernardino County Public Library*  
*CA, CLA Chair ’95*  
*Public Relations and Marketing Round Table*  
*Director at Large, Public Relations Society of America - Inland Empire Chapter*

"If your organization does not have a public relations person who produces all your publicity, try this...For each event, make the person responsible for producing the event also responsible for writing a press release (or for having it written). Designate an administrator in the organization or a member of the executive board to review all news releases for quality and consistency of message before they are sent out to the media."

**Alyce J. Archuleta**  
*Volunteer Coordinator*  
*San Diego Public Library, CA*
The increasing use and acceptance of e-mail provides library communicators with a fast and cost effective vehicle for transmitting notices and press releases. In general, anything you could say with snail mail or fax you can say with e-mail. There are specific rules to follow in the preparation of any press release and these apply to e-mail releases as well. But there are also some special considerations concerning e-mail PR.

Get Them To Read It

Sometimes it seems that it is far too easy for someone to throw a paper press release in the trash. It is even easier to hit the delete key on an e-mail release. If your release hits the trash (real or virtual) before being read, you have wasted the time spent in preparing and distributing that release. Here are a few rules to keep your news out of the trash.

Never Spam!

Never send untargeted e-mail. The first job of a communicator is to speak the same language as the listener. Before you even consider drafting a press release, consider to whom it will be sent. Know what kind of news every potential recipient is inclined to deal with and target only those who are likely to be interested in the information you want to transmit. There are no prizes going to the person who sends out greatest number of releases, and there is no point in sending a release to someone who has no interest in the subject.

Make It Friendly

The first thing that an e-mail recipient sees is the subject line. So make the subject something that will make the reader want to see what is in the message. A subject line saying "Press Release" is a sure fire way to activate that delete key. Try something like "Wellville Public Library Is Now Online!" or "Wellville Is Connected To The World Wide Web" on the subject line.

Make It Complete

Include all of the pertinent information. It is obvious that an e-mail release should contain the e-mail address of the sender and any appropriate URLs. But a press release taken from print and copied into e-mail verbatim may not. And don't forget all the usual stuff (contact information, headline, who, what, when, where, why). E-mail addresses and URLs should go on a separate line — isolated from other text. This will prevent confusion with punctuation marks and will make addresses and URLs stand out and allow for easy copying and pasting.

KISS

Don't get fancy. Increasingly, mail client software allows font, type size and color changes. But not all. What may be beautiful on your mail software may be completely unreadable on someone else's. Stay with plain text. Also, some mail client software (especially that of the UNIX flavor) does not automatically wrap lines — so it's a good idea to insert line breaks by hitting the return key at the end of each line. A line length of 65 characters is about right for mail reading.

• Tip 1: When laying out the copy, type "1234567890" repeated seven times across the top of your sheet. This will give you a gauge of how long your lines are.
Tip 2: In Microsoft Word use 10pt. courier type and a line width of 5.45 inches to get 65 characters on each line. Then save the file as "text with line breaks" and copy to your mail software.

Keep the release copy as short as possible without skimping on the message.

**It's Not For Everyone**

Even though e-mail is becoming more viable as a press release vehicle, there are still people who don't have it, don't like it and won't use it. A balanced public relations program will use e-mail as one component of a coordinated communications effort. Most situations will also demand conventional printed releases sent via snail mail, fax releases, and phone calls. Web pages, Acrobat files, and notes on paper napkins may work too.

The key is not how you send the information but to whom and how well it is communicated.