

Writing stories, not press releases

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(With apologies to Shakespeare.)

When Hamlet wants to determine whether his step-father is guilty of regicide, he doesn't directly ask Claudius, "Did you kill my father?" Instead, he stages a play that will capture the man's interest and, Hamlet hopes, reveal his guilt.

The best marketing and PR is like this. We don't approach our audience and ask them – or worse, *tell* them – "Buy our product!" Instead, before we begin to create any form of communication, we consider how to frame it as a story that someone will want to follow. Our brains and hearts are searching for meaning, for connections, for understanding our place in the world, and stories help us find that.

Writing a news release or promotional material requires the same skills as writing a novel: inspiration, practice and a compelling story. Nothing is duller than reading about the specs of a product. Instead, what we want is to know about people, their challenges and how they met a real-life problem. It doesn't mean that your story can't contain technical details – it should. You just need to wrap them into an interesting tale. This applies to all forms of media: paid (ads), earned (pitched articles and news releases), owned (blog posts) and shared (Tweets and Google+ posts).

Embassy TVC for Ster Kinekor

Here's an example. We wrote and distributed [a news release](#) for [Embassy](#), a South African production company that makes TV commercials. It reviews video works-in-progress between its offices in Johannesburg, Cape Town and London. To do this, it uses our client's products, [Frankie](#) and [cineSync](#). This release could've been about the specs of those tools. It's not. Instead, it focuses on how Embassy has successfully migrated into the new era of remote workflows, showing that geography no longer needs to be an impediment to working with the best.

This story was picked up by over fifty online publications, giving our client a customer story with a long shelf life.