By Jon Boroshok

Making a journalist's job easier to do increases your chances of being covered, and one of the most effective ways to do this is with an easily accessed, informative online pressroom.

The press is overworked, under-staffed and usually under deadline, so journalists need facts and figures quickly. When reporters contact you for information, return these calls or e-mails immediately, not the next day. Their deadline is near, and as soon as the reporter leaves you a message, there's a good chance your competition will be his/her next call.

Top reasons journalists visit a company's Web sit include:

- Finding a PR contact (name, telephone number, e-mail address)
- Checking basic facts about the company (spelling of an executive's name or date of birth, headquarters location, current financial data, type of products, etc.)
- Researching the company's own "spin" or reaction to events, regulations, and economic factors that impact its market and marketability
- Checking financial information, such as the annual report
- Downloading images, such as executive photos or logos, to use as illustrations in stories

It's appalling how few companies make finding this information easy. I've seen company (and PR agency) Web sites that don't indicate where the company is located, and actually require the media to fill out a form to request information! Simply having a pressroom on your Web site is not enough - it has to be easy to find, easy to use, and up-to date.

TechMarcom's 10-point usability test for online pressrooms:

1. **Is it easy to find?** There should be an obvious "press room" link on your home page.

2. **Is it easy to access?** It should be plain HTML, with no flash or other bandwidth hogging technologies. One click from the home page opens the pressroom. No passwords or registration required. The media won't fill out forms.

3. **Is your PR contact the first item?** The name, full street address, phone number, and e-mail address of your primary PR contact should "jump out" at a reporter.

4. **Is there a "press release" section?** There should be, and that section should only be one click away from the main pressroom. Releases should be in chronological order, with full headline in plain view.

5. **Are releases easy to access?** One click should open the press release on screen. Many reporters work from home on old computers with dial-up Internet access. They won't download a PDF or MS Word file. Avoid unnecessary animations, useless graphics, and irrelevant "smiley" photos. Press releases should open as HTML files, with the *option* to download a copy in MS Word, *not* PDF format.

6. **Is there an online media kit?** Again, just one click away from the main press page, your online kit should contain a company backgrounder (who you are and what you do), bios of key officers, stock/investor information (if a public company), a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document, one-click downloadable company logos and photos of products and company officers. All photos and logos should be downloadable in high resolution (at least 300 dpi) and low resolution (72 dpi) formats.

7. **Is the pressroom full of hype and buzzwords?** This is not a marketing document. It should be factual and hype free. The goal is to help the press do their job, not "sell" them.

8. **Is it timely and up-to-date?** All information should be current. Do you still list a contact who is no longer with the company? Do all e-mail addresses still work? The pressroom should be updated on as close to a real-time basis as possible. If you put out a press release this morning, it should be accessible on your Web site this morning, not this afternoon.

9. **Does it include links to coverage you've received?** The online pressroom should have links to as much media coverage as possible, and all links should be checked periodically to make sure they are still working.

10. **Have you included case studies?** Nothing tells your story better than a happy customer. If you've solved a problem for another company, make sure you tell the story in your online pressroom. Case studies should be one click away from the main pressroom. For more about case studies as a PR tool, see http://www.techmarcom.com/studies.html

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With over 15 years of experience, Jon Boroshok is a veteran of high-tech public relations and marketing communications. He is the president and founder of TechMarcom, an independent agency specializing in value-based marketing communications for technology companies, and its Biotech Marcom division, providing PR and marketing communications for the life sciences. An accomplished strategist and writer, his articles and columns have appeared in The Boston Globe, Crain Communications, Primedia Business Magazines, ZDNet, CMP Publications, East Bay Business Times, Mass High Tech, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, DM News, PRWeek, and more.

Boroshok has a B.S. in communications from Emerson College and an M.B.A. in marketing from Northeastern University.