

How Not to Get Lost in the Shuffle: Producing the Most Effective and  
Eye-Catching Press Release

A Senior Project

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By

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## ABSTRACT

The following study investigates how to produce the most effective and eye-catching press release on a national level for Summit Outdoor Supply (S.O.S). Winter quarter of 2014, my partner and I worked on a local campaign for S.O.S., using traditional text-based press releases to get media coverage. Although we did see some success with the traditional press release, there were often times our releases would get lost in the shuffle of the many releases that media outlets received each day. My goal with this project is to learn how to produce a press release that will get noticed out of hundreds and even thousands of others. Part of this will come from straying away from the traditional written press release and moving into a interactive multimedia press release that can follow the new style of multimedia PR. The rise of this multimedia PR is giving public relation professionals an advantage of reaching target audiences in non-traditional settings (PR Newswire, 2014).

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## **Chapter 1**

### *Introduction*

#### **Statement Problem**

When one hears press release, the first thing that most likely comes to mind is a white sheet of paper, a company's header, and a slew of facts given in two to three paragraphs. Although this is technically a press release, how effective is it really?

#### **Background of the Problem**

Summit Outdoor Supply was fortunate enough to have a successful local campaign. Most of the media and coverage they received had to do with their partnership with the San Luis Obispo Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber would use the press releases we wrote to either cover the story on their site or get it covered by other local sources by forwarding the release to them (Derrico, E. & Swanson, D., 2014, p. 14). Of course there were other means of communication and partnerships that made the campaign more effective, however, moving into creating a national campaign, our press releases need to better catch the viewer's attention.

#### **Purpose of the Study**

With S.O.S. launching a new product in Summer 2014, my partner and I would like to expand our launch on a national level. Our intention is to craft a new innovative release that can be viewed by either media or the consumer, and will draw them in.

## **Setting for the Study**

This study will be completed with the use of data collected on the subject and implementation of a press release that can adhere to a national level campaign. With S.O.S. launching their new product, we are trying to gain recognition of this new product launch. Our intention is to gain more recognition for our new product with the use of our innovative release. Sending our new release will most likely be done electronically via email.

## **Research Questions**

The following research questions were created to develop a thorough understanding of the evolution of the press release in order to utilize this tool to the best of our ability.

1. Is an interactive press release more effective than the traditional written release?
2. How can you increase the popularity or viewership of a press release?
3. What is the best format for an effective press release?
4. What are the most important elements to include in an effective press release?
5. What is the best way to reach your target audiences with your release?
6. What is the outcome of using interactive press releases versus traditional press releases?

## **Definition of Terms**

The following terms are being presented to the reader to further emphasize repeating topics of the study and assist in further knowledge of the old fashioned and innovative press releases.

Press Release: a communication tool used by public communication practitioners to make a particular message known to specific news media outlets (Diggs-Brown, 2013).

Search Engine Optimization (SEO): A system of making a Web site and/or its content highly relevant for both search engines and searchers through the use of targeted keywords and phrases (Majchrzak, E., 2008).

The Gatekeeping Theory: the editorial process by which potential news stories are evaluated, and yes/no decisions are made as to whether those stories are published or broadcast (Bobbitt & Sullivan, 2009).

## Chapter 2

### *Literature Review*

The review of the literature outlines the use of a press releases and how to strategically engineer messages that motivate stakeholders to take action (Dunn, N., 2014).

#### **The Traditional Press Release**

A press release or news release is “a communication tool used by public communication practitioners to convey a particular message to specific news media outlets”(Diggs-Brown, 2007, p. 129). They have been used for decades in order to try to get the media to disseminate news to the audience. If one has studied journalism, one will recall from their textbooks the traditional inverted pyramid style for writing a press release. According to the inverted pyramid style, all of the most important or interesting information is conveyed at the very beginning, and then is followed by the information that is not as important (Diggs-Brown, 2007, p. 136).

Although the inverted pyramid style is probably one of the most effective formats to write a press release, it is by no means a secret. According to “Online press releases can be an effective vehicle to drive lead-gen” by PR News in 2013, press releases are considered to be one of the most effective ways to reach a large amount of media outlets, however, in today’s world the volume of releases that are sent to media outlets are increasingly high, making it difficult to capture attention. Brandon Hopkins, also hits on this point in *Tips for press releases in reputation management from industry veteran brandon hopkins* by PR Newswire January 2014, “Press releases are ranking very well right now, so it is important to understand how to properly utilize them....” (Hopkins, PR Newswire, 2014).

## **Suggestions For Effective Press Releases**

Based on The Gatekeeping Theory, it is known that news outlets really hold the control as to which stories are evaluated and then published or broadcasted (Bobbitt & Sullivan, 2009). To ensure better chances of your release being chosen, customization catering to our media cultured world may be in order. PR News makes this point very clear in their article “Immortalize your press releases online via SEO” in 2010, when they say, “With the growth of online video, multimedia press releases are becoming increasingly popular and are highly effective.”

According to “7 tactics for creating more effective press releases” by PR News in 2013 bringing in more customization and interaction to your reader makes a release more effective. The first tactic mentioned recommends creating multiple messages in order to tailor to different audiences. To follow this, the article moves into building press releases around different news hooks and offering any back-story, related posts, embedded video, and also highlighting any key personalities. With this, the article urges the reader to always use unique and trackable URLs that direct your readers to related and relevant content. In case your reader may want to share what you have shared with them, the literature also prompts the release to include social media opportunities such as “click to tweet” near the top of the release or somewhere visible.

The next tactics PR News highlights are regarding making the information interaction process between the release and the reader as smooth as possible. For example, the first thing mentioned is to keep headlines to 100 characters or fewer and to also keep the subject lines of your email short and straight to the point. To build on this, the article emphasizes to write for the mobile viewer first. Trying to catch someone on the go means

you need to stick to the micro content principles; short sentences and graphs, punchy quotes, and bullets. Also in order to do this, your content needs to be made portable; can all your information be accessed from their device and can they quickly export that information to other social media outlets with ease. The last thing to keep in mind is including a call to action; invite your customers to do what you are looking for them to do.

According to Pranikoff who posted an info graphic by PR Newswire in July of 2011, it is proven that the more multimedia placed into a press release, the more views it will receive. This info graphic, that will be displayed in Chapter 4, shows that the increase in average online views per press release increase with the more multimedia elements provided. Press releases with text and a photo showed +14% views while text plus video was viewed +20%. Press releases that had text, photos, and video showed to be viewed +48%. Releases that included text, photos, videos, and other media were viewed +77%. To add, another info graphic published in August 2013, titled “Press release dos and don’ts” holds a quote from PR Newswire that states, “Include photos, videos, info graphics and/or logos (they’re shared 3.5 times more than text-only)” (PR Newswire, Allen, K., 2014). This info graphic will also be present in Chapter 4.

## **Press Releases & Search Engine Optimization**

The rewards of optimization can be wonderful; when SEO is successful, people will find you on search engines at no cost to you (Lancaster, J., 2010). According to “Immortalize your press releases online via SEO” by PR News in 2010, another interesting new anomaly is making a search engine optimized press release. This article states the content in a press release, “.....is fresh meat to a search engine, but the content needs to be

optimized and tagged to be search-engine-friendly. Search engines love content, and press releases are a valuable source” (PR News, 2010). The article also mentions tips on how to make the best use of SEO. First recommendation they make is to anchor text, related tags, and search engine friendly metadata to improve the relevance of the release by boosting the placement of your release in the search engine results. With this they also advise to do research on which keywords to use to ensure the best results. Along with many other articles, they also urge you to included social media widgets so people can share your news.

## **Chapter 3**

### *Methodology*

This chapter will be used to discuss the how we received information on the methods we chose to use for our release, as well as, the results and feedback we received from our release.

#### **Data Sources**

For this study, two different forms of data were collected and analyzed. First, individuals from the news profession who read, review and follow-up on press releases were chosen to be interviewed on press releases. The three sources involved came from three different news outlets. Two of the interviewees were interviewed at their work locations and were asked to answer a series of questions regarding their experiences with press releases. The other interviewee was asked the same set of questions via email.

Second, after data was collected from the following news sources, a innovative press release was created by the S.O.S. team based off of research found from our sources and the literature review.

#### **Participants**

The participants for this study were three individuals from three different news sources who review press releases. The first participant, Sean McMinn has been the Managing Editor for Mustang News for the 2013-2014 academic school year.

The second participant, Kathrene Herndon has been the Assignment Editor for KSBY TV in San Luis Obispo since July 2013. The third participant, Marla Fain, is the Assignment Editor for NBC4 News in Los Angeles.

## **Interview Design**

Two different interview designs were used to collect data from the interviewees. I interviewed both Herndon and McMinn at their workplaces on-on-one. I conducted Fain's interview via email by sending her the question, and her sending me her responses. All the interviewees were asked the following questions:

1. On average, how many press releases do you receive each day?
2. Of those press releases, how many do you actually pursue?
3. What makes a press release stand out to you, and how do you decide if you will choose to pursue it?
4. Is it more likely a release will get chosen if there are pictures, videos, and other media provided for you?
5. What are your recommended do's of press releases?
6. What are your recommended don'ts of press releases?

## **Data Collection**

All data collection was done by myself and was organized accordingly in tables to show the answers of each interviewee. Each interviewee's answers to questions 1-4 will be shown on one table, and each participant's do's and don't's will be listed on their own individual tables . These results will be presented in Chapter 4.

## **Data Presentation**

The data collected from these interviews was used to create an effective innovative press release for S.O.S. as they attempt to inform their customers of a new product they will release in Summer 2014. The release created took into account all of tips given by the interviewees as well as information learned from the literature review. This press release will be presented in Chapter 4.

## **Limitations**

There are limitations to this project due to the amount of time given to conduct the plan. California Polytechnic State University San Luis Obispo's Journalism Department provides students with one quarter or 12 weeks to complete senior project. Due to the complexity of the project, 12 weeks did not provide enough time for all data to be collected. S.O.S was in the process of working out the kinks on a new product, Barkley 2.0, along with waiting on a pending patent. The patent pending limited the amount of information we were allowed to give. The intention of this project was to create a release for Barkley 2.0. Since the product will not be able to be sold until Summer 2014, a press release for news outlets was not attainable, however, a teaser press release for consumers by using the internet as a media channel for email correspondence was obtained. Another limitation for this project was that the format for our release wasn't exactly perfect due to S.O.S.'s use of MailChimp. This purchased email service the company uses was unable to allow us to play video from within an email, but instead takes you to another window, which is what we were looking to avoid.

## **Delimitations**

Time and schedule constraints brought delimitations to this project. Due to the influx of emails and calls news channels receive, it was very hard to acquire interviewee subjects were willing to answer questions. Since this was the case, I decided to select three interview subjects because of access of participants.

## **Chapter 4**

### *Data Analysis*

Chapter 4 will provide explanations to how the strategy was implemented for the Barkley 2.0 teaser release. The data will summarize the requirements for an excellent press release that the media and consumer would appreciate. The data will also measure the amount of awareness the release received, and the results that stemmed from that such as sales and website views. The results will be compared to one another, as well as be compared to the research found in Chapter 2.

### **Student News Outlet**

Sean McMinn was used a participant from the student news center, Mustang News, at Cal Poly. McMinn has been the Managing Editor for Mustangs News throughout the 2013-2014 academic school year. He previously worked as a reporter for The Mustang Daily and was a intern and correspondent for USA Today. McMinn has received numerous awards and scholarships such as the Jim Hayes Scholarship, Reporter of the Year by The Mustang Daily, and the Stephen Donnellan Moss Memorial Scholarship in Journalism. McMinn is graduating Cal Poly Spring 2014 with a Bachelor of Science in news-editorial Journalism with a minor in statistics.

### **Local News Station**

Kathrene Herndon was used as a participant from the San Luis Obispo local news station KSBY-TV. Herndon has been an Assignment Editor with KSBY since July 2013. Previously Herndon has worked as the Daybreak and weekend producer at KSBY TV, and

also as a copyeditor for a local paper. Herndon graduated from Cal Poly's Journalism department with a concentration in print in 2007.

### **California News Station**

Marla Fain was used as a participant from NBC4 News Los Angeles.

### **Interview Questions**

The following data collected from mentioned news sources will be presented in tables. Each participant's answers for the first four questions will be listed on Table 1. Following Table 1, each participant will receive their own tables of their own do's and don'ts of press releases.

Table 1

*Interview Questions 1-4*

Questions	Participants		
	Sean McMinn	Kathrene Herndon	Marla Fain
<b>On average how many press releases do you receive each day?</b>	About 30 a day	"I receive so many emails it is really hard to say."	"It's hard to say how many press releases I receive each day but what I can say is on a routine day I receive about 200 emails- maybe 50 of those are press releases with that number doubling sometimes."
<b>Of those releases, how many do you actually pursue?</b>	About one a day	"The number of press releases that I have to actually look into is about 50. Those are specific press releases that I need to read to see if we will do any coverage."	
<b>What makes a press release stand out to you, and how do you decide if you will choose to pursue it?</b>	<p>"If the release seems to be mass distributed, I'll skip over it. If it mentions Mustang News or my name I'll read it because it was specifically for me."</p> <p>-If it is that is relevant to campus</p> <p>-Newsworthiness</p>	<p>-Clear and concise</p> <p>-Newsworthiness</p> <p>-Contains all necessary information</p> <p>"A good press release is one where the Word doc. or PDF is attached, and the basics of the info are in the email. Not much, but basically explaining why I should open the attachment."</p>	<p>-Informative</p> <p>-Concise</p> <p>-Short as possible but contains enough relevant information</p> <p>"Each station or media outlet will be a little different but for KNBC we try to do stories with a 4You benefit. Those types of stories tend to be chosen. We always prefer real people to officials. We may get information from officials but it's real people that tell a better story."</p>
<b>Is it more likely a release will get chosen if there are pictures, videos, and other media provided for you?</b>	"No, I would say that is more of a benefit. But I wouldn't pursue a story because there was multimedia. If there was a super compelling photo at the beginning I might be more willing to read it."	"It really depends on the release. If it is something that has already happened, a check presentation, ceremony, etc., then pictures or video definitely help, but if it is something in the future, mentioning that pictures or video would be available or a contact person we could get them from if we are unable to make it is always a benefit!"	

Table 2

***Sean McMinn Do's & Don'ts***

Do's	Don'ts
If it is an event have the date of the event in the subject line	Use word attachments or something to click to like a website. "I don't want to waste my time. It's easier if it is in the email itself."
Start with what the story is. Directly say what it is in your lead.	Ramble on about something before you get to your point
Provide contacts; experts who can talk about the story or someone who is planning the event (Provide more than one)	Ask people to just publish the press release itself as a story "It's insulting to us."
Put the text of the release in the email	Demand it gets done on a certain day or that it's on a certain page, etc. Use fancy fonts or weird sizes Put it in as a HTML coded email "Sometimes it doesn't load on my email. Clicking things isn't something I like to do when I am reading through all of these." Follow up more than once. "It would be really nice if we had time to respond to everyone but we cant." Keep pushing if someone says no Send a press release that is embargoed before checking to see if the journalist is okay with the embargo

Table 3

***Kathrene Herndon Do's & Don'ts***

Do's	Don'ts
Lay everything out	Just tell us to cover it "You should tell us why we should cover it."
Have short paragraph (4-5 paragraphs)	Use a ton of text and make it more than one page long "If you don't cut to the chase, we probably won't know what you are talking about."
Include all details Include pictures & videos if relevant	Have it read as an advertisement Mention if another media outlet has already covered it or is covering the event "Mentioning that another news source will be there does not guarantee any coverage from us."
Make sure you know who you are addressing or do not address at all	Send it too early or too late "If they are sent too early, it takes a lot more time to re-read the information and figure out if it is something we will cover, and if they are sent too late, especially the day of or day before, there is a good chance we will not have anyone available to cover it."
Put down your contact information Mention in the press release that pictures or video are available if we cannot make it along with the contact number for someone that day "So we can still include the story in our newscasts even if we are unable to send a photographer or reporter out to the event."	Be demanding

Table 4

***Marla Fain Do's & Don'ts***

Do's	Don'ts
Send the release a few days ahead of the event-4 or 5 days is good	Argue and insist you sent it a press release if you call and they tell you they did not receive it. "We're sure you did and it could have been overlooked or deleted."
Make a follow up phone call 2 days before	Call multiple times
If you can't call, re-send the release once, the day before the event and just say- "Hi-sending you a reminder about blah, blah, blah".	If there is a major breaking news story-like a wildfire and the station has broken into programming to cover it live-DO NOT CALL AT THAT TIME.
If it is something that may have statistics or other relevant info state that more information such as .... is available.	Send the release if you know a station or a newspaper doesn't cover certain types of news

**Research Questions on Press Releases**

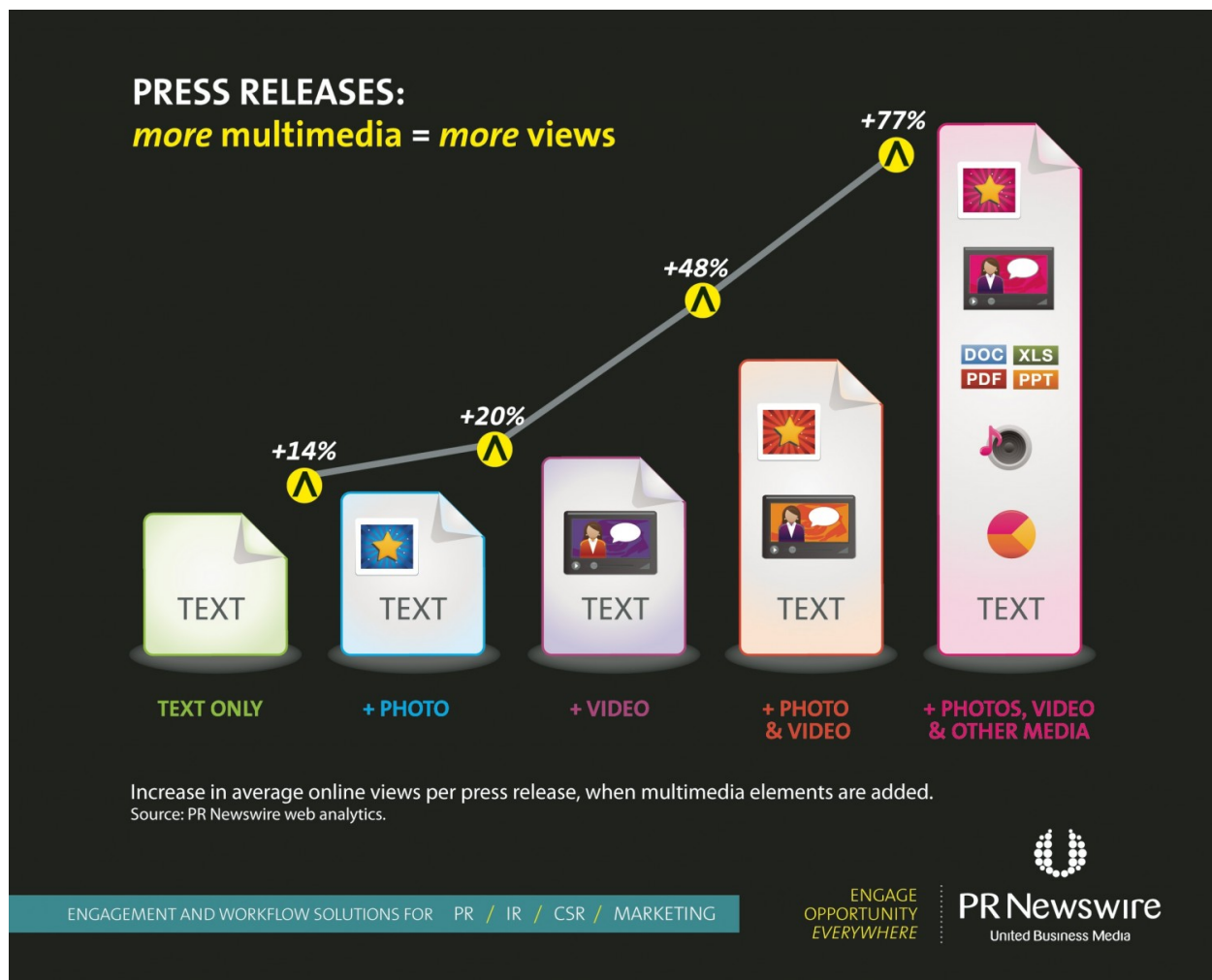
For this project the following research questions were created to develop a thorough understanding of the evolution of the press release in order to utilize this tool to the best of our ability when it came to creating one for S.O.S.

**Research Question #1: Is an interactive press release more effective than the traditional written release?**

- "With the growth of online video, multimedia press releases are becoming increasingly popular and are highly effective" (PR News, 2010).

- According to Pranikoff who posted an info graphic by PR Newswire in July of 2011, it is proven that the more multimedia placed into a press release, the more views it will receive. See Figure 1.

Figure 1



**Research Question #2: How can you increase the popularity or viewership of a press release?**

- Answers to Research Question #1 applicable to this question.
- Make the information interaction process between the release and the reader as smooth as possible. For example, keep headlines to 100 characters or fewer and to also keep the subject lines of your email short and straight to the point. To build on this, write for the mobile viewer first. Trying to catch someone on the go means you need to stick to the micro content principles; short sentences and graphs, punchy quotes, and bullets. Also in order to do this, your content needs to be made portable; can all your information be accessed from their device and can they quickly export that information to other social media outlets with ease (PR News, 2013).
- Anchor text, related tags, and search engine friendly metadata to improve the relevance of the release by boosting the placement of your release in the search engine results (PR News, 2010).
- Do research on which keywords to use in your release to ensure the best results search engine results (PR News, 2010).
- Included social media widgets so people can share your news (PR News, 2010).

**Research Question #3: What is the best format for an effective press release?**

- Using the inverted pyramid style- all of the most important or interesting information is conveyed at the very beginning, and then is

followed by the information that is not as important (Diggs-Brown, 2007, p. 136).

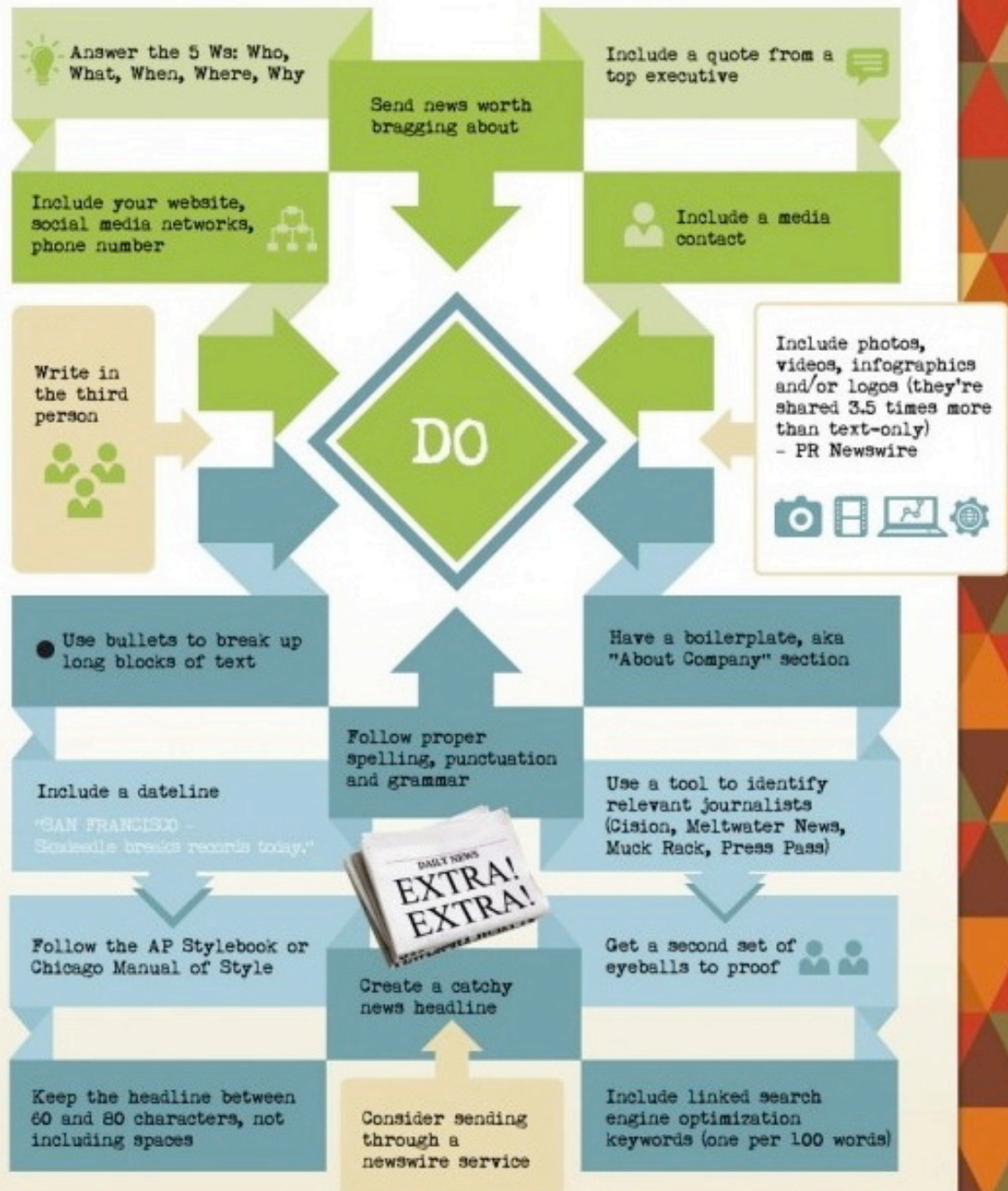
**Research Question #4: What are the most important elements to include in an effective press release?**

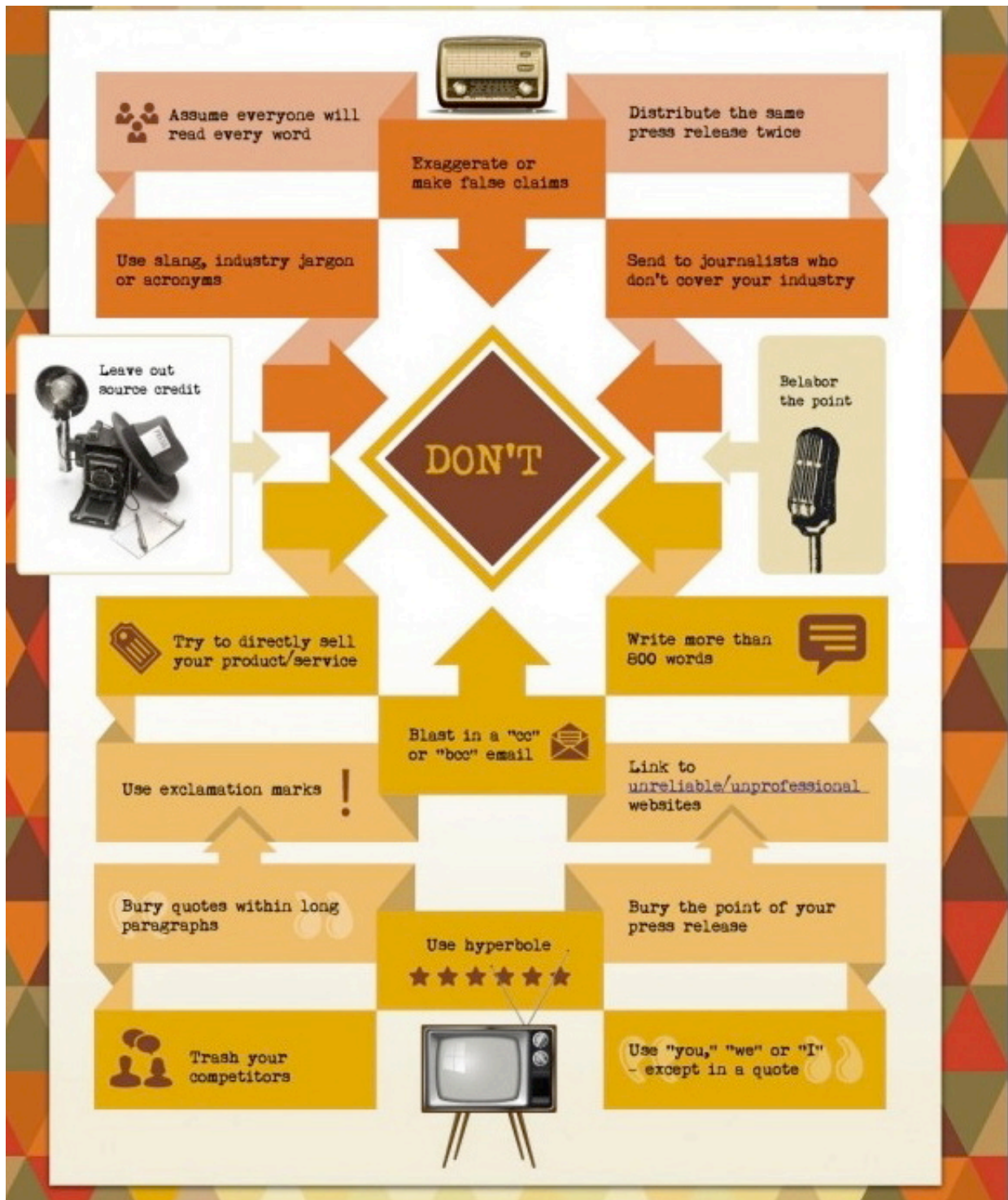
- The following info graphic titled “Press release dos and don’ts” published in August 2013, gives a clear understanding of what elements to include and not to include. See Figure 2.

Figure 2

# Press Releases

## Dos & Don'ts





**Research Question#5: What is the best way to reach your target audiences with your release?**

- Create multiple messages in order to tailor to different audiences.  
Build press releases around different news hooks and offer any back-story, related posts, embedded video, and also highlight any key personalities. Use unique and trackable URLs that direct your readers to related and relevant content. In case your reader may want to share what you have shared with them, include social media opportunities such as “click to tweet” near the top of the release or somewhere visible (PR News, 2013).

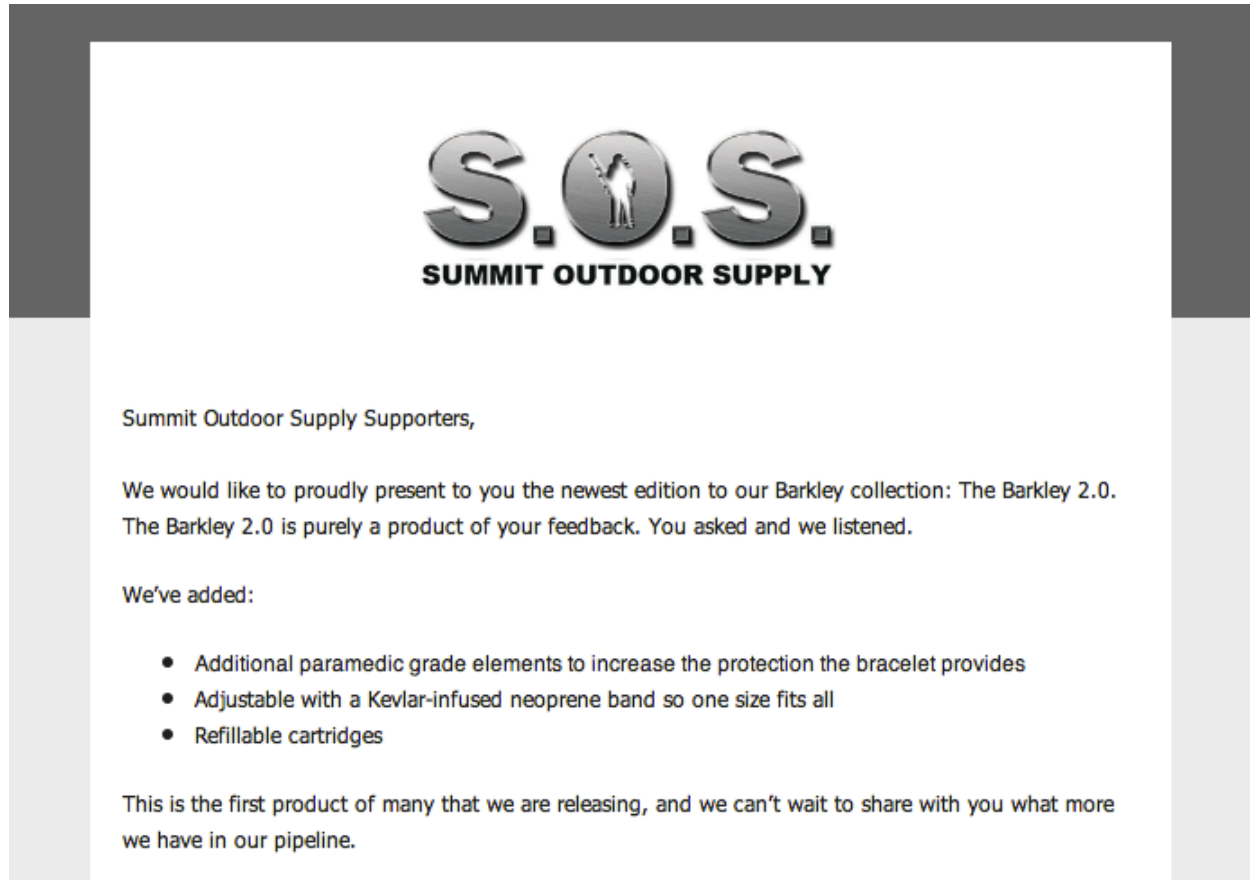
**Research Question #6: What is the outcome of using interactive press releases versus traditional press releases?**

- Answers to Research Question#1 applicable to this question.

**Summit Outdoor Supply Innovative Press Release**

The Barkley 2.0 teaser release was designed based off of the data provided by the interview participants and the literature review. The release was designed using MailChimp and is an interactive email that contains short to the point text in inverted pyramid style as well as relevant video, a photo, hyperlinks, and social media widgets. The release is also formatted to work with any mobile device. Figure 3 shows the release email, and Figure 4 shows the release email on a mobile device.

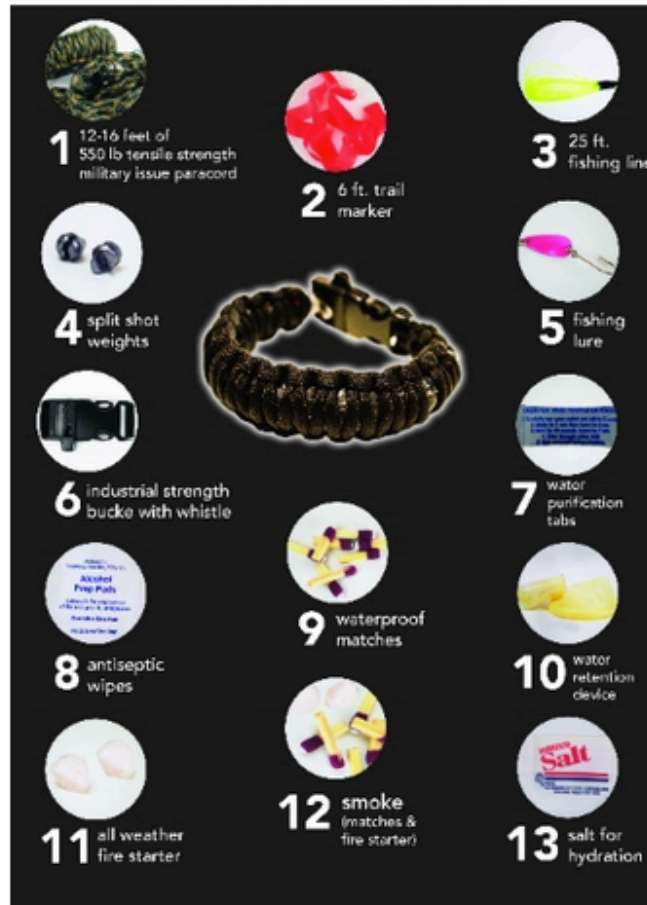
Figure 3





Along with our [new products](#) we have also completely revamped our website to enhance navigability and better represent our brand and mission statement. Visitors can now visualize what's inside our signature Barkley Series bracelet with our [new video](#) which scrolls through the contents and provides explanation.

## BARKLEY SERIES



Another recent development for S.O.S. is our [new storefront](#) in Atascadero, California. We're now open to the public every day of the week to benefit our local patrons, and have expanded our retail locations throughout the country. We've added a store locator within our website to assist you on your search for the perfect S.O.S. product.

[CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITE](#)



Facebook



Twitter

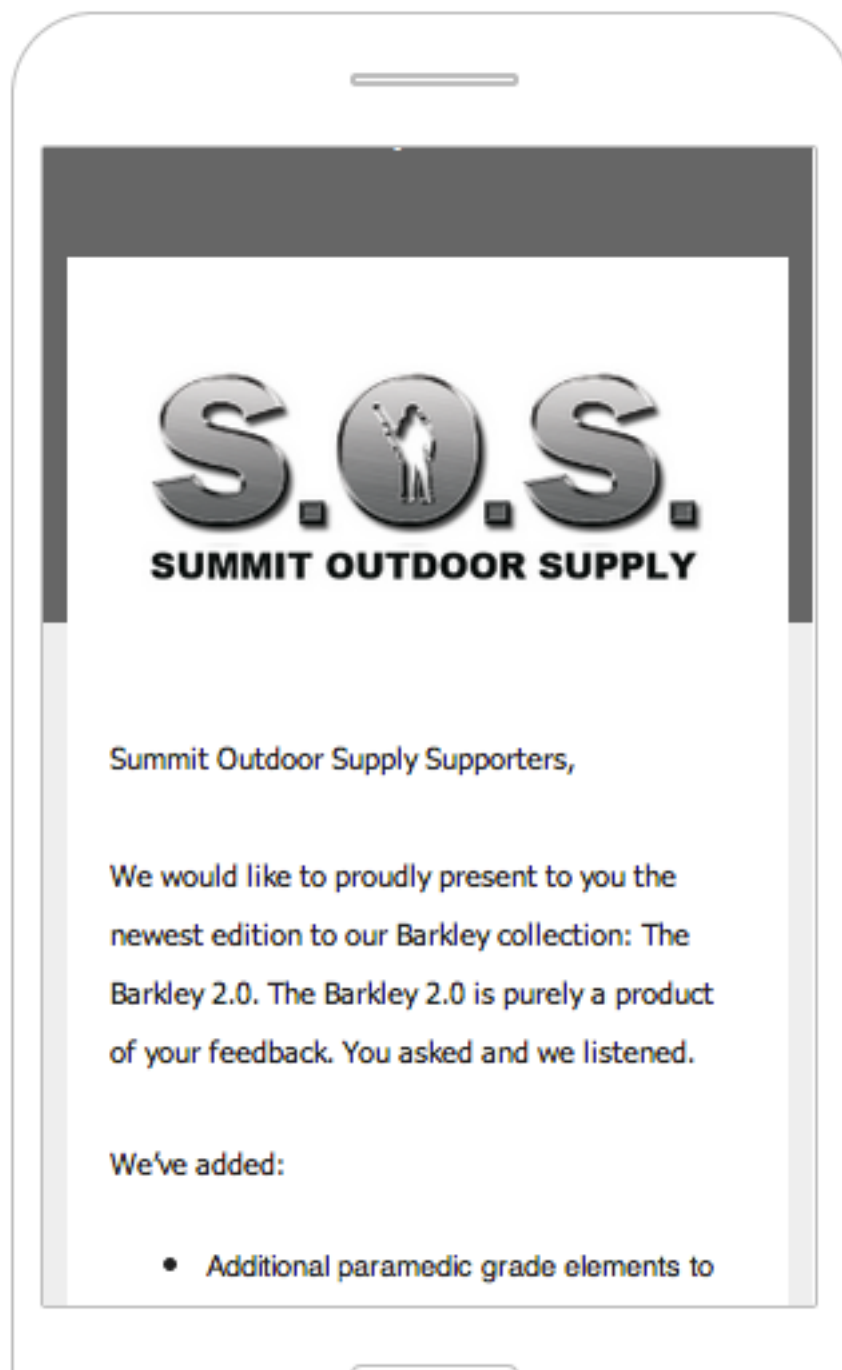


Instagram

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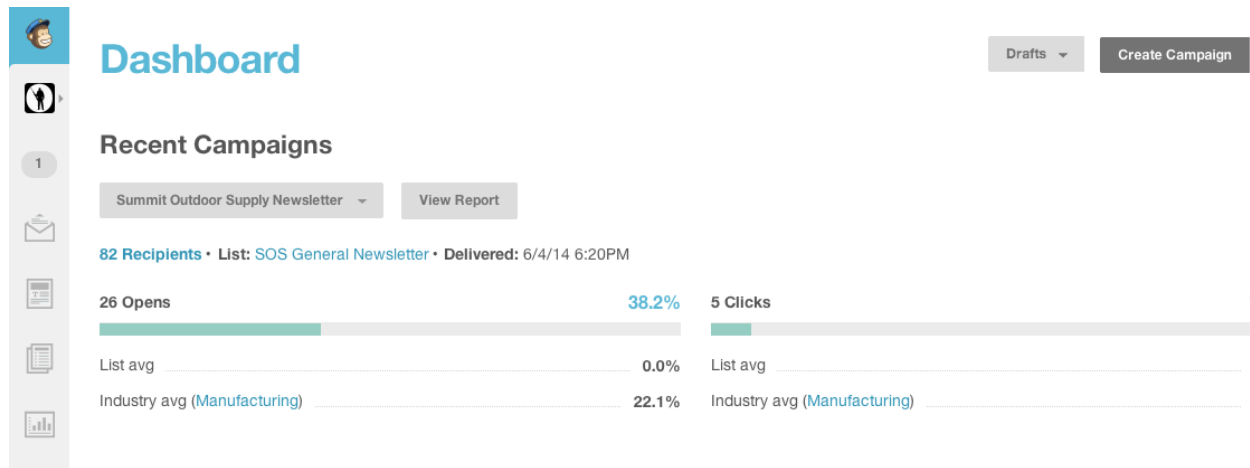
Figure 4



## Innovative Release Results

The following results are regarding the innovative Barkley 2.0 teaser release that was sent to customers of S.O.S. The release was sent out June 4, 2014 at 6:20pm. See Figure 5 for results.

Figure 5



## **Chapter 5**

### *Discussions and Recommendations*

#### **Summary**

How Not to Get Lost in the Shuffle: Producing the Most Effective and Eye Catching Press Release, was done by a journalism student at Cal Poly who saw a need to stand out in order to increase views and results of a press release. This Cal Poly student partnered with journalism student Devon Swanson, to work with S.O.S. in providing them the tools needed to create a successful national campaign. The goal for this project was to prove that the traditional text-based release that was used for S.O.S.'s local campaign was out dated and that an innovative release would be more effective.

In order to meet the goal of the project, the student formulated six research questions that broke down each aspect of a press release. From there, extensive research was done to answer the questions, along with interviews with news professionals. When all the data had been collected and studied, the student followed the guidelines of what was discovered in order to design the release. Once the release was all designed, it was sent to customer's of S.O.S. using their past email lists.

#### **Findings**

The goal of proving that text-based releases are outdated and not as effective and that innovative media filled releases are more effective was achieved. The best data example that shows that this goal was clearly achieved is Figure 4 in Chapter 4, which shows that releases with text, photos, videos, and other media receive 77% more views than a traditional text-based release (Pranikoff, M. 2011).

As for the results from the Barkley 2.0 teaser release, out of 82 recipients, 26 customers opened the email. Although this turn out is only at 38.2% there may be a few outliers that contributed to this (MailChimp, 2014). A lot of the recipients from S.O.S.'s mailing list were customers who know the company as San Luis Obispo Outdoor Supply, their original name before they changed it in 2013. S.O.S. never had a chance to inform these customers of the name switch, which could have led to less either less recipients opening the email or the message going to their spam. It cannot be determined as to whether or not this release has increased sales because the Barkley 2.0 will not be available for sale until Summer 2014.

## **Conclusion**

Though many people might think of a white page with 4-5 paragraphs of text when they think of an effective press release, that thought is now outdated. Effective press releases are now multimedia press releases that are following the growth of our multimedia culture (PR News, 2010). The most effective releases will be the ones that are customized and tailored to each audience and stick to micro concept principle when it comes to text (PR News, 2013). They will also include relevant photos, videos, hyperlinks, and social media widgets (Pranikoff, M., 2011). They can also include tools such as researched keywords to increase SEO presence (PR News, 2010). This is the new formula for not getting lost in the shuffle and creating the most effective press release.

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