

CISION®

2021

**State**  
of the

**Press Release**



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# Executive Summary

You can tell a lot about a culture by examining the stories they tell. The same can be said of companies and the stories they share with their audiences. While the pandemic has affected the way companies interact with their audiences, in many cases, organizations have chosen to overcommunicate in order to regain the visibility with their stakeholders that the pandemic took away.

We examined more than 100,000 U.S. press releases from the past year, surveyed PR pros about their press release practices, and we're sharing what we learned about the stories they're telling.

Additionally, in this report, we're providing you with some tips and tricks to make sure your next press release has all the right elements to effectively maximize its reach. Because if a press release falls in the forest and no one's around to read it, does it make a sound? If you follow our guidance, you can ignore that question.

Join us as we examine press release trends and best practices in Cision's second annual State of the Press Release.

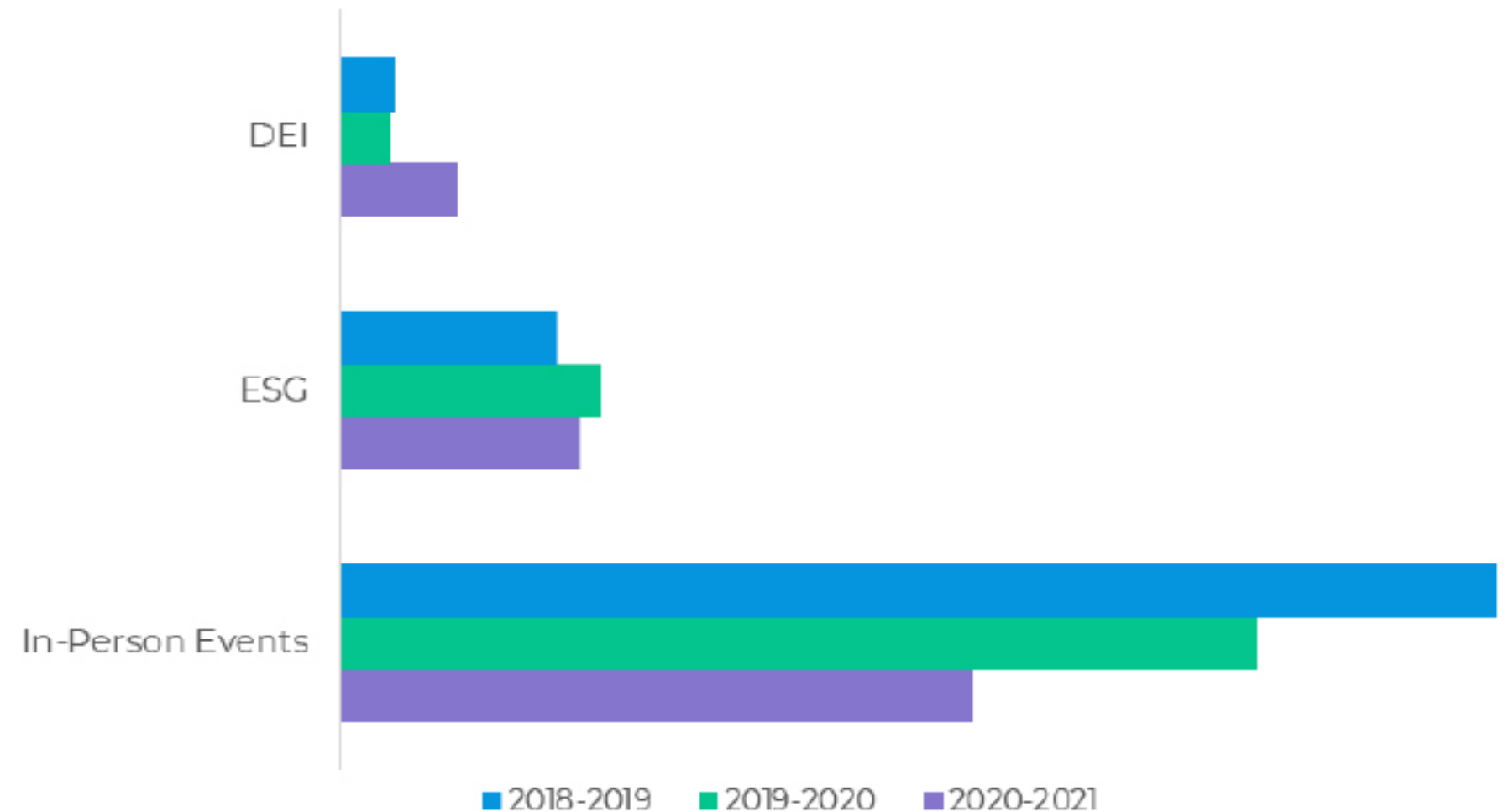


# What is “Normal” Now?

The idea of “getting back to normal” is a concept that many are pining for, yet it seems clear that the definition of “normal” has permanently changed. As the world continues to evolve as a result of the pandemic, the values and priorities of customers, investors and employees have changed as well. Consequently, the messages corporations are sending out reflect these changes.

It’s apparent that diversity, equity, inclusion (DEI) and environmental, social and governance (ESG) are becoming increasingly popular subjects in society, and companies are communicating their commitment to those issues.

## Volume of Press Releases by Subject (U.S. Data)

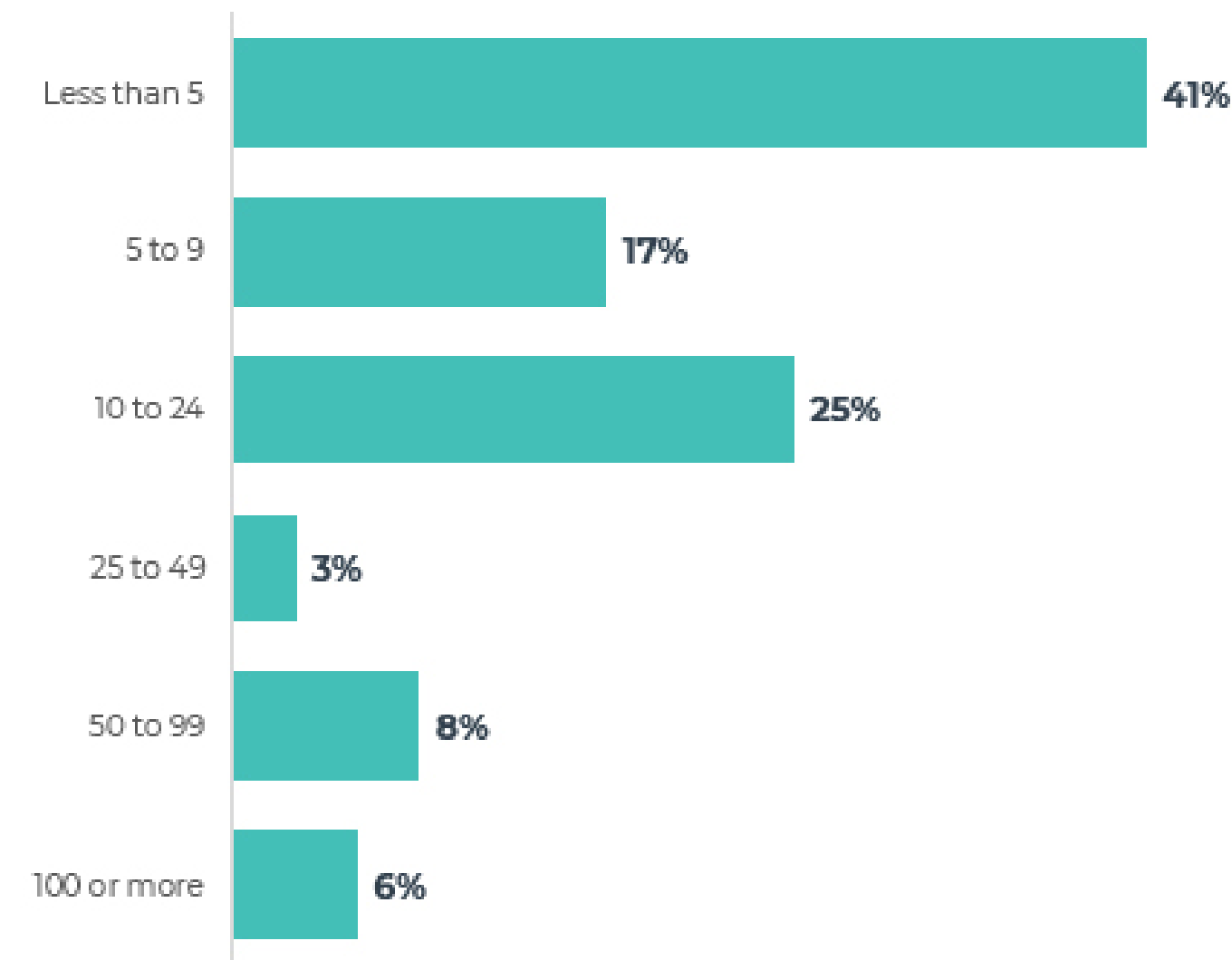


# What PR Pros are Saying

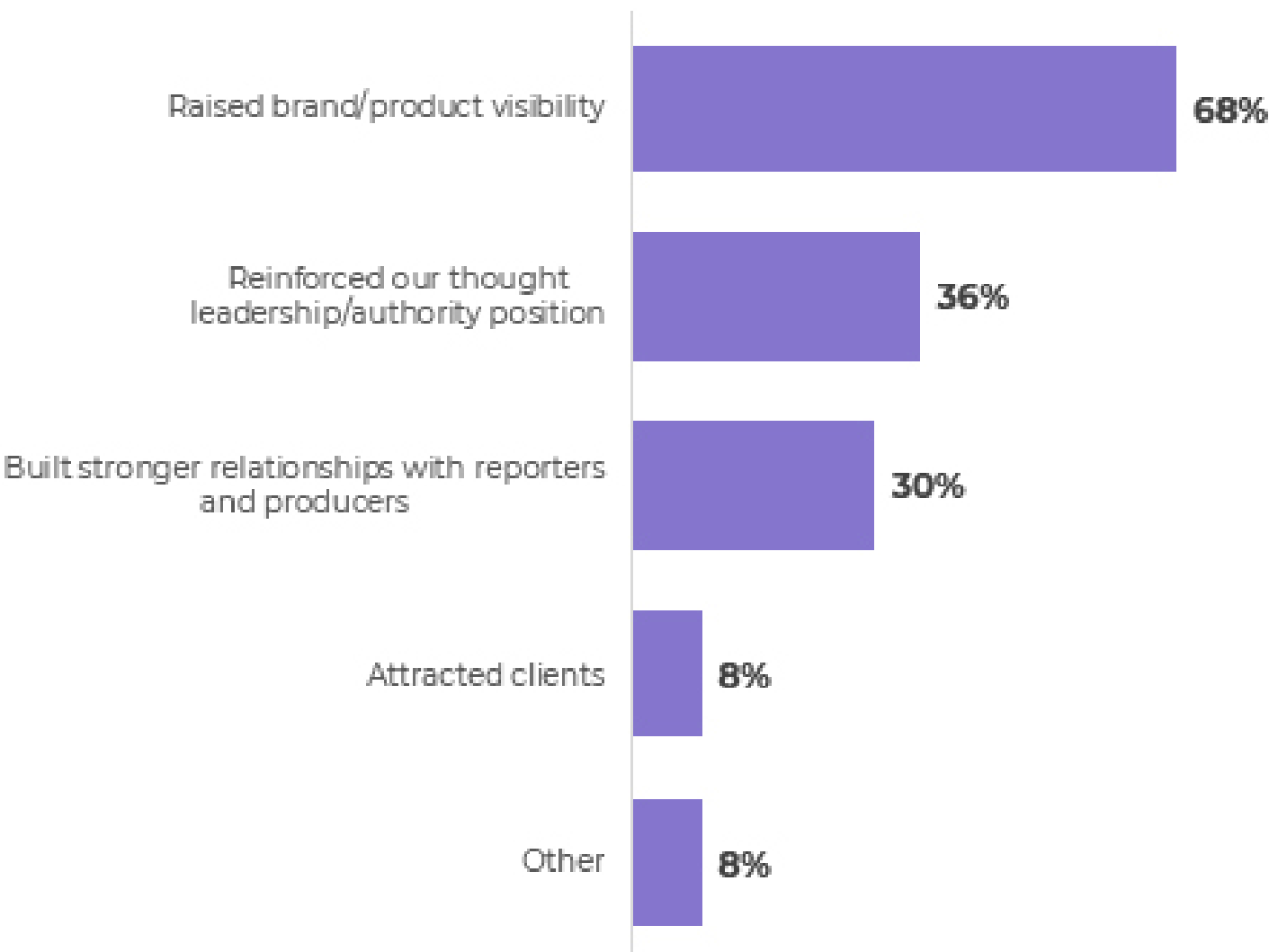
For our second annual report, in addition to an analysis, we wanted to hear from those who work behind the scenes to create the press releases we help distribute. We surveyed a group of comms professionals about their press release habits, and they opened up about why they send press releases, the challenges they face, and how they measure success. Most respondents agreed that releases were a valuable tool to spread their messages, and most plan to continue using them to promote their organizations' most important news.



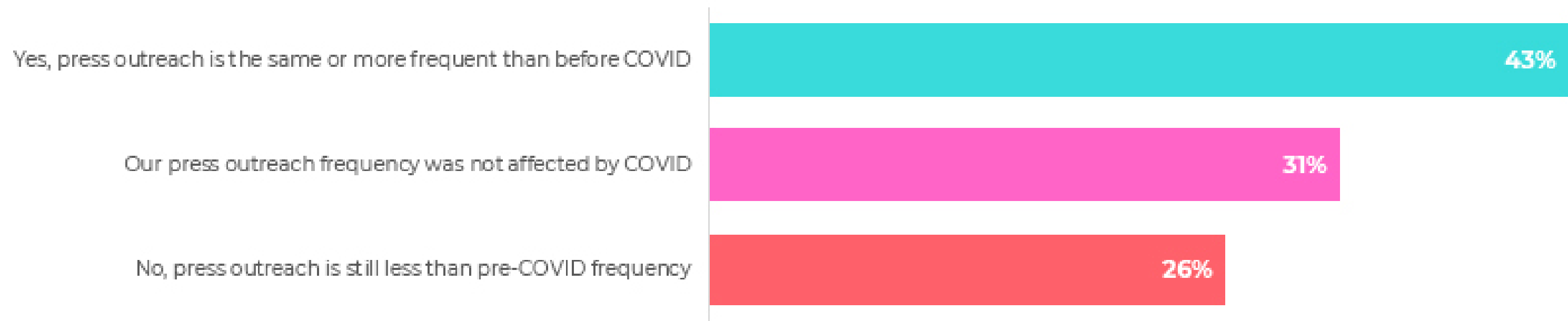
On average, how many press releases do you send over the wire in a year? (U.S. Data)



How has sending a press release over the wire helped your organization? Indicate all that apply. (U.S. Data)



# Has the frequency of your press outreach returned to pre-COVID levels? (U.S. Data)



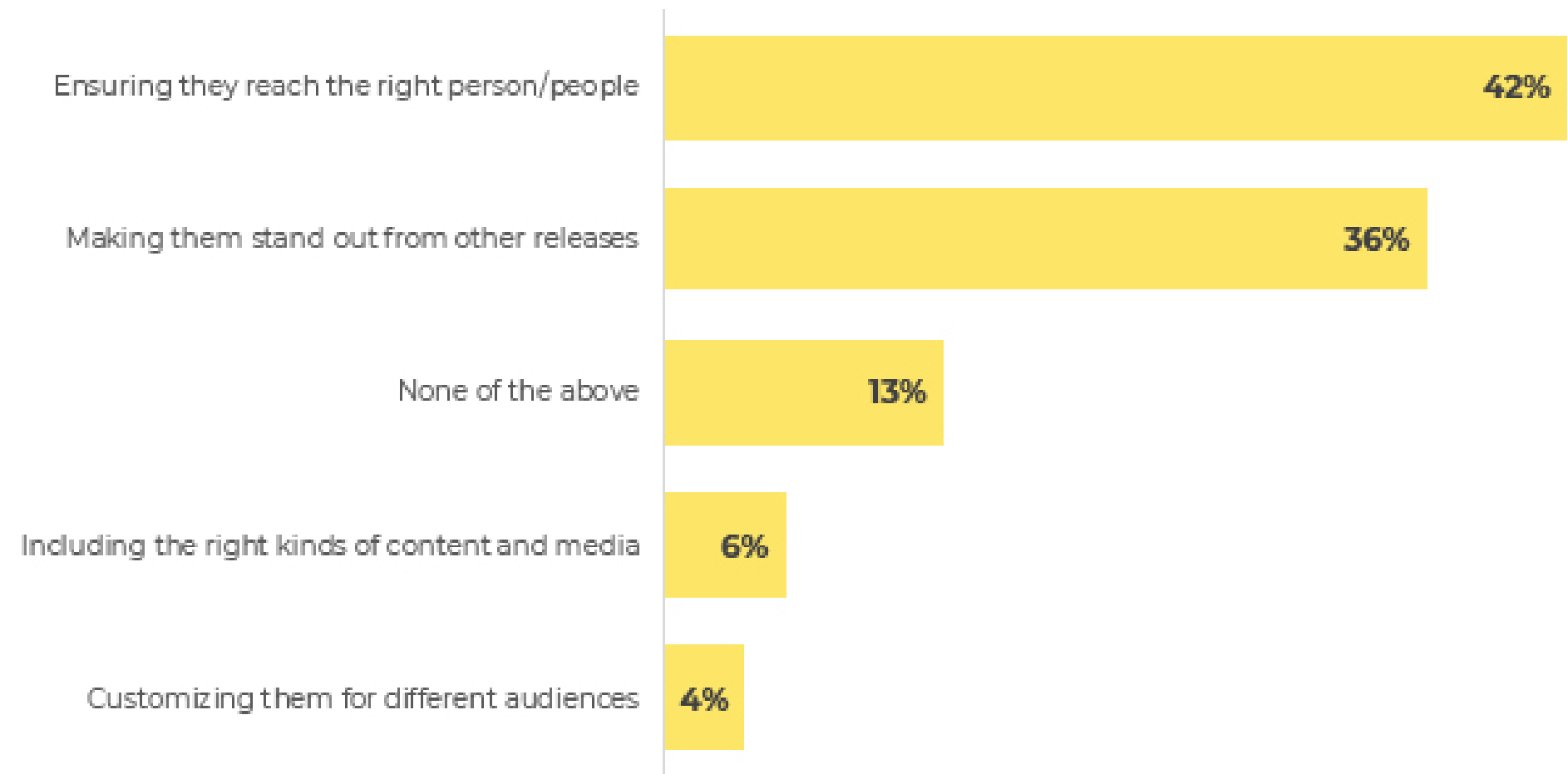
When considering the concept of “getting back to normal,” many are likely wondering how the PR business is faring in comparison to the pre-COVID period. The good news is that 74% of respondents said that their press outreach was either on par or more frequent than before COVID or not impacted by the pandemic at all.

There has been no shortage of crises for companies to respond to in the last year, and it is evident that the majority of comms pros understand the importance of maintaining visibility and connecting with their audiences even in times of uncertainty.



It should come as no surprise that PR pros say cutting through the cacophony of available content is their biggest challenge when sending press releases. Forty-two percent of respondents find it difficult to ensure their messages reach the right audience, while 36% say they struggle to make their releases stand out from the rest.

What is your top challenge as it relates to press releases? (U.S. Data)



THE GIFT THAT KEEPS ON GIVING

Much like the Goonies, press releases never (truly) say die: 30% of our respondents reported that a journalist has indeed contacted them about a release they’ve sent over the wire several months – or even a year or more – after they’ve sent it. What does that tell us? Content in press releases has a shelf life far longer than you might realize, which is why we encourage clients to [create derivative content](#) to make your message go further.



# What is the focus of press releases you plan to send out in the next 12 months? (U.S. Data)

It's clear that that PR pros think the press release is a powerful tool to disseminate their company's news. The vast majority of participants (84%) chose this as a reason they plan to send out a future release.

Thought leadership is another popular topic; however, only half of PR pros are taking advantage of this opportunity to position their brand leaders as industry experts and build credibility with audiences. In our conversations with clients, many told us that they used thought leadership articles to connect with their audiences when the pandemic hit and they were unable to interface with clients and customers as they normally would. **Remember: Educating your target audience is one of the best ways to promote your content and give it the boost it needs (and deserves).**

PR pros are also focusing heavily on DEI, CSR and ESG as topics for press releases. Our analysis showed an increase in press releases focused on these topics over the last year, and it appears that the trend will likely continue.



# Crafting an Engaging Press Release

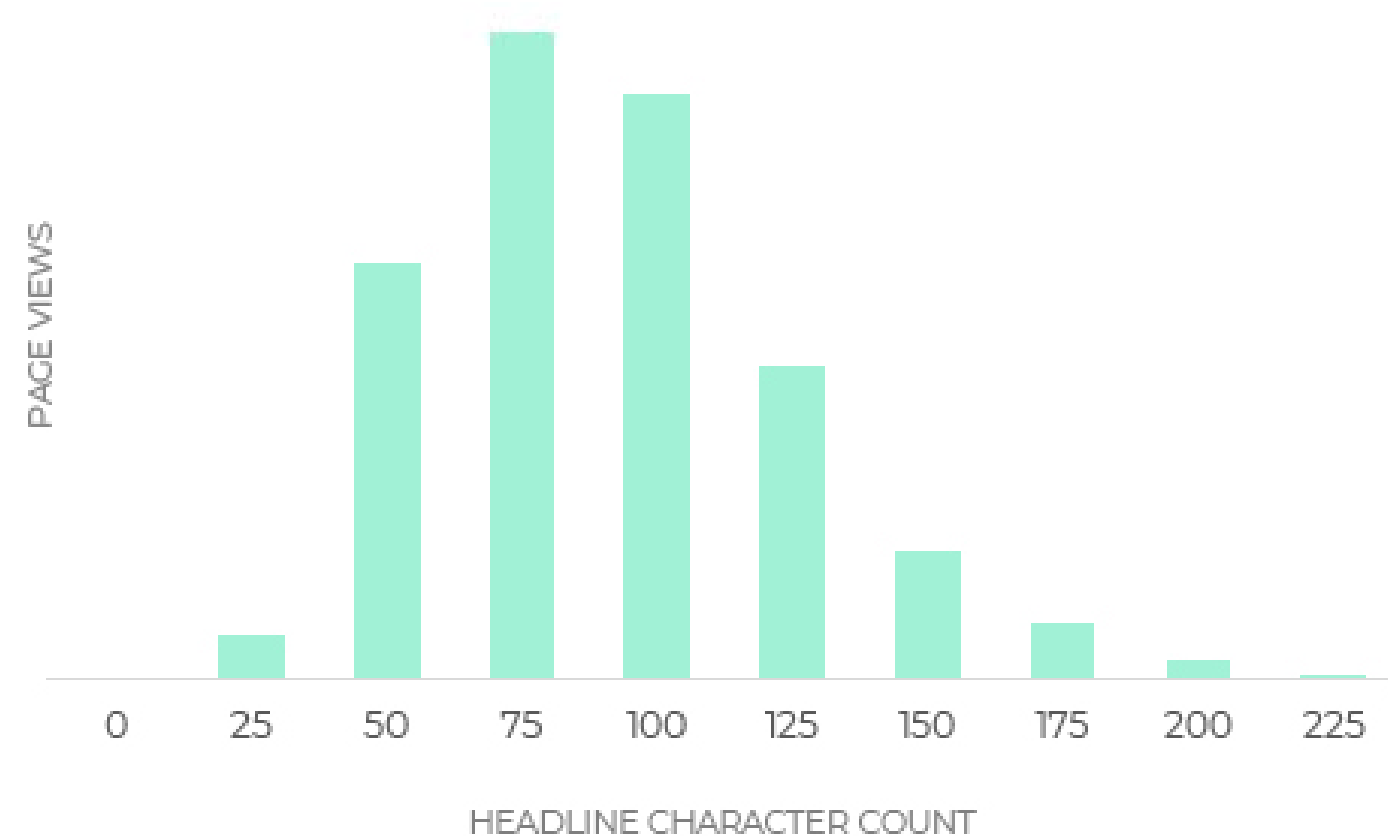
Believe it or not, there is a not-so-secret sauce when it comes to writing a press release that receives high engagement and leaves a lasting impression. From choosing impactful words in your headline, to ensuring your release format is easily digestible, to including multimedia elements, we are giving you the ingredients to cook your release to (near) perfection.



# U.S. Headline News

The headline is the first thing readers will see when they view your release, so it should be attention-grabbing (but not clickbait-y!) and straight to the point. If possible, try to aim for 70 characters or less, because email applications and Google's search engine will cut off any text over that amount.

## Most Used Words in U.S. Release Headlines



## Most Used Words in Release Headlines



# Which Action Verbs Should You Use in a Headline?

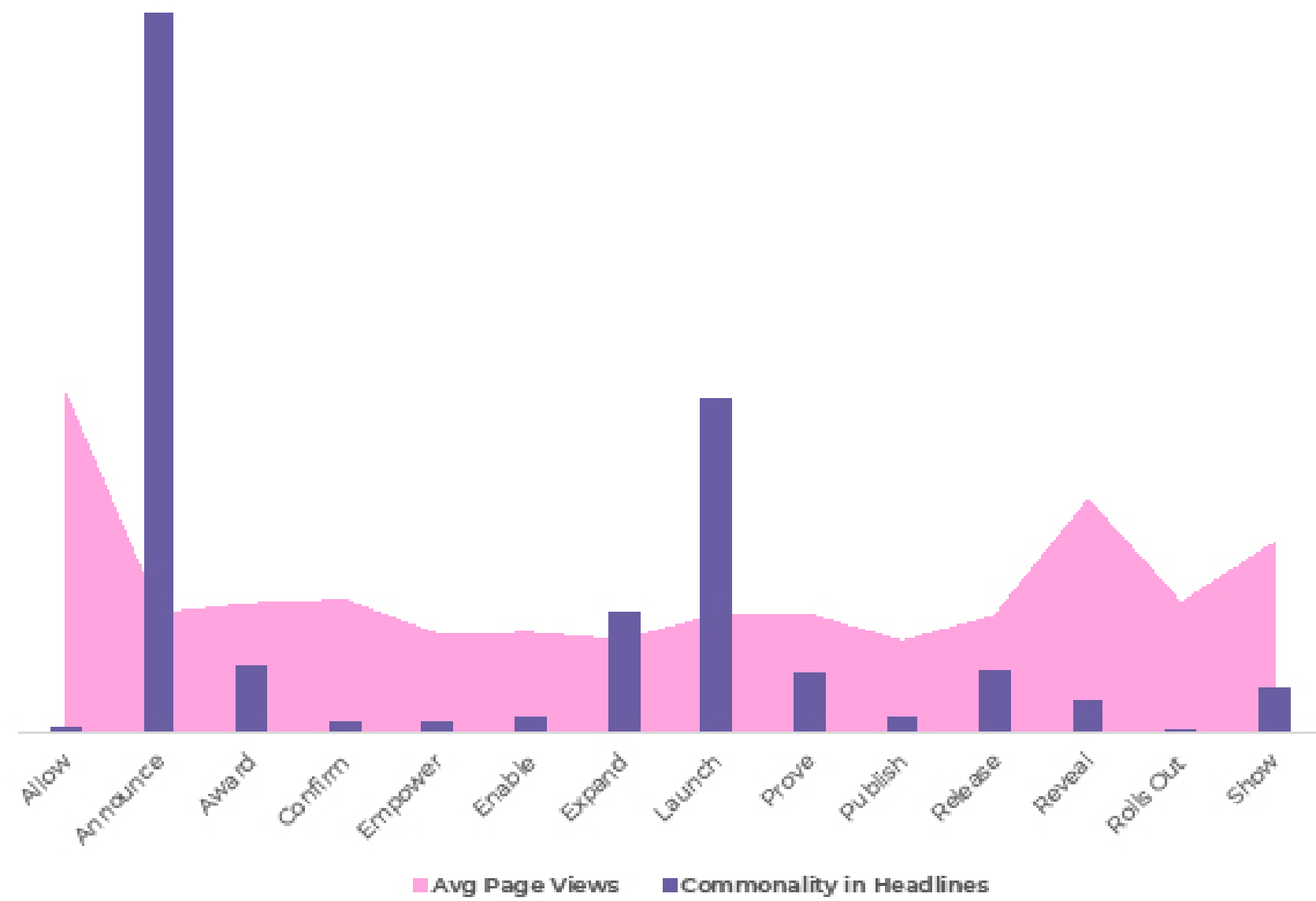
Now that you know the optimal length of a headline, let’s dig into some of the most commonly used action verbs in press release headlines and their relationship to views on PRNewswire.com.

“Announce” is clearly a favored word to use, but when it comes to views, readers seem to collectively shrug their shoulders when they see it in a headline.

“Launch” is another ubiquitous headline word, but its performance relative to its use is more closely aligned.

“Show” and “rolls out” aren’t widely used in press release headlines, but the data indicate that they should be, considering the popularity of the releases that use them.

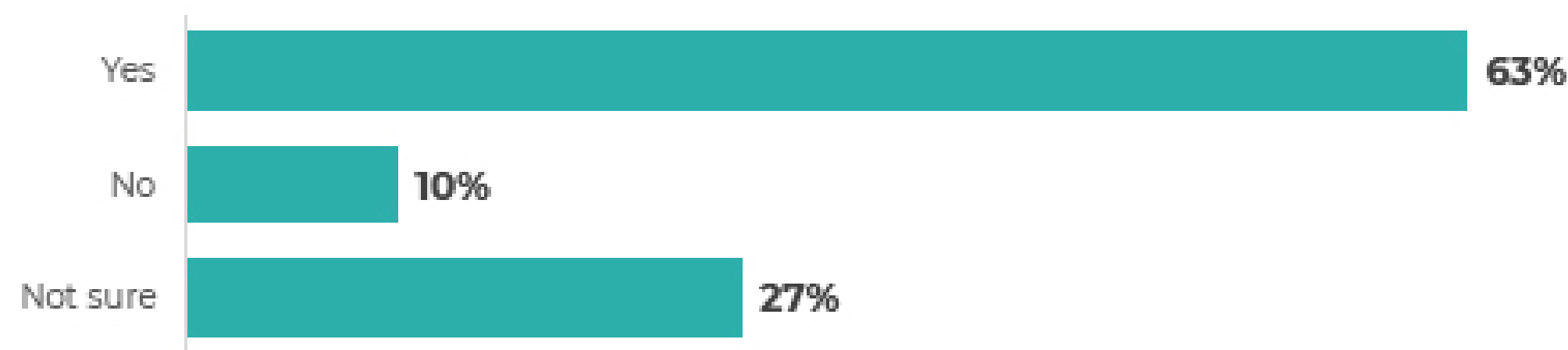
Finally, “allow” and “reveal” seem to be the dark horses of the bunch. Perhaps the intrigue these words provoke has readers clicking to see what the brands are allowing and revealing.



# Mainstreaming Multimedia

Another best practice we preach is including multimedia in press releases, so naturally, we were thrilled to see that 63% of the PR pros we surveyed plan to do just that in the coming year.

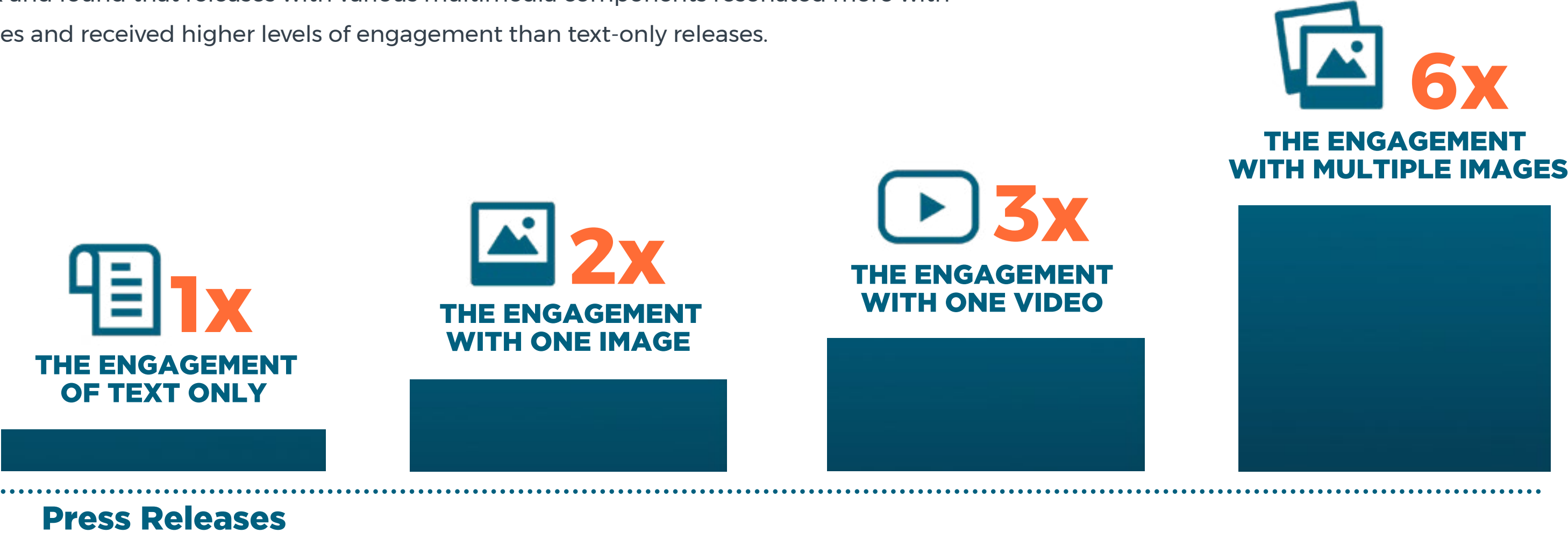
Over the next 12 months, do you plan to include multimedia elements (photos, videos, graphics, etc.) when you send a press release over the wire?



Most comms professionals see the value of including multimedia with a release. (Which will be good news for journalists, who say multimedia is a “must-have” inclusion in press releases, according to the [2021 State of the Media](#) survey.) Among the biggest reasons for using multimedia, according to respondents: it helps tell their organization’s story, and it increases press coverage.

However, some respondents were skeptical that adding multimedia had much of an impact and questioned whether it was worth the additional cost. We see your skepticism, and we’ll raise you some statistics...

Cision PR Newswire analyzed levels of engagement for press releases distributed through our network and found that releases with various multimedia components resonated more with audiences and received higher levels of engagement than text-only releases.



Why do we constantly advise our clients to add multimedia components to their releases? For the same reason parents nag their kids to eat their vegetables: Because it’s good for you.



# Distribution

You've put in the time and effort to write a newsworthy press release – complete with a short, impactful headline and eye-catching multimedia components. Now what? Your release is ready for showtime! But before it goes out into the wild, there are a few more steps to take before your audience starts catching what you're throwing.





# Cision Accuracy & Catches

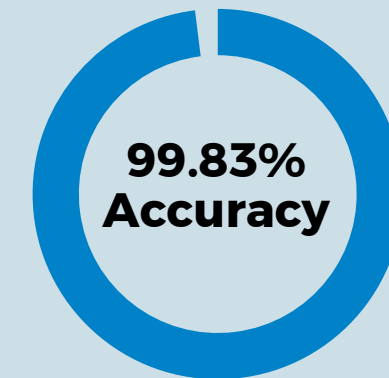
Like your best friends, Cision will be there for you like we've been there before. We know mistakes happen, and we're here to catch them before your press release is sent out. We compiled a list, checked it twice, and we're pleased to report we caught many errors prior to release distribution.

When a client sends out a release and does not require further editing after the release is distributed, we label it an "accurate" release and give them a high five.

For those that need a little more refining, our editorial team works hard to ensure that each and every one of the over 100,000 press releases that go out every year are free of mistakes, and we pride ourselves on achieving nearly 100% accuracy.

**1,533**

The number of catches found after clients sent their final release drafts for review to Cision's editorial team.



## What are the most common oversights the Cision team catches?

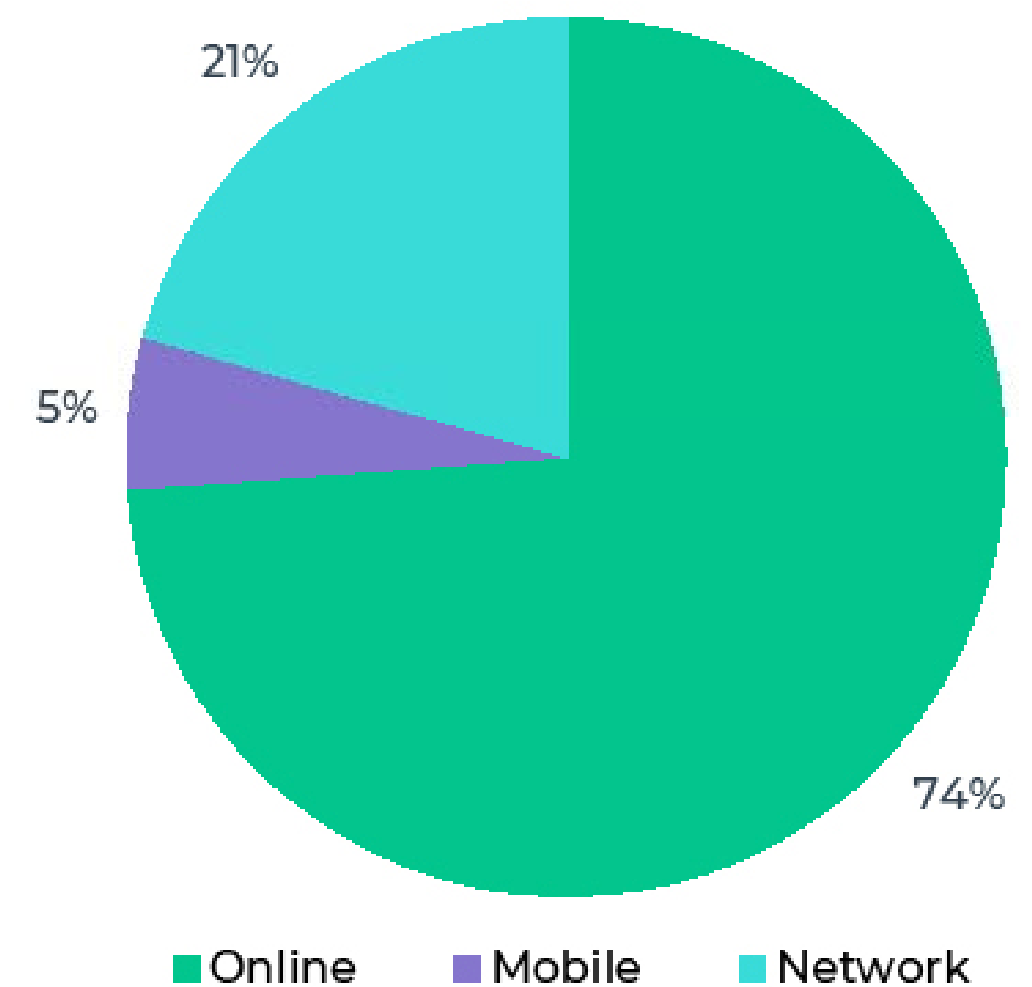
- Hyperlink errors
- Misspellings
- Incorrect dateline dates
- Grammar mistakes
- Day/date discrepancies

# Where are Readers Viewing Releases?

When you're thinking about writing a press release, it's helpful to know on which platforms readers are viewing your content. For instance, if you link to an external site in your release, you want to make sure that site is optimized for mobile viewers. **Ensuring your readers have a seamless experience viewing your content increases the likelihood they will engage with your message.**

Below is a guide to each classification in the pie chart:

- Online views are classified as all desktop views on PRNewswire.com and our internationally affiliated sites (**i.e. Newswire.ca**)
- Mobile views include smartphone and tablet views of PRNewswire.com and internationally affiliated sites
- Network views consist of both mobile and desktop views from our PR Newswire for Journalists (PRNJ) users—which include journalists, bloggers and influencers—as well as views from content placement by our partner sites (i.e. *Yahoo News*)



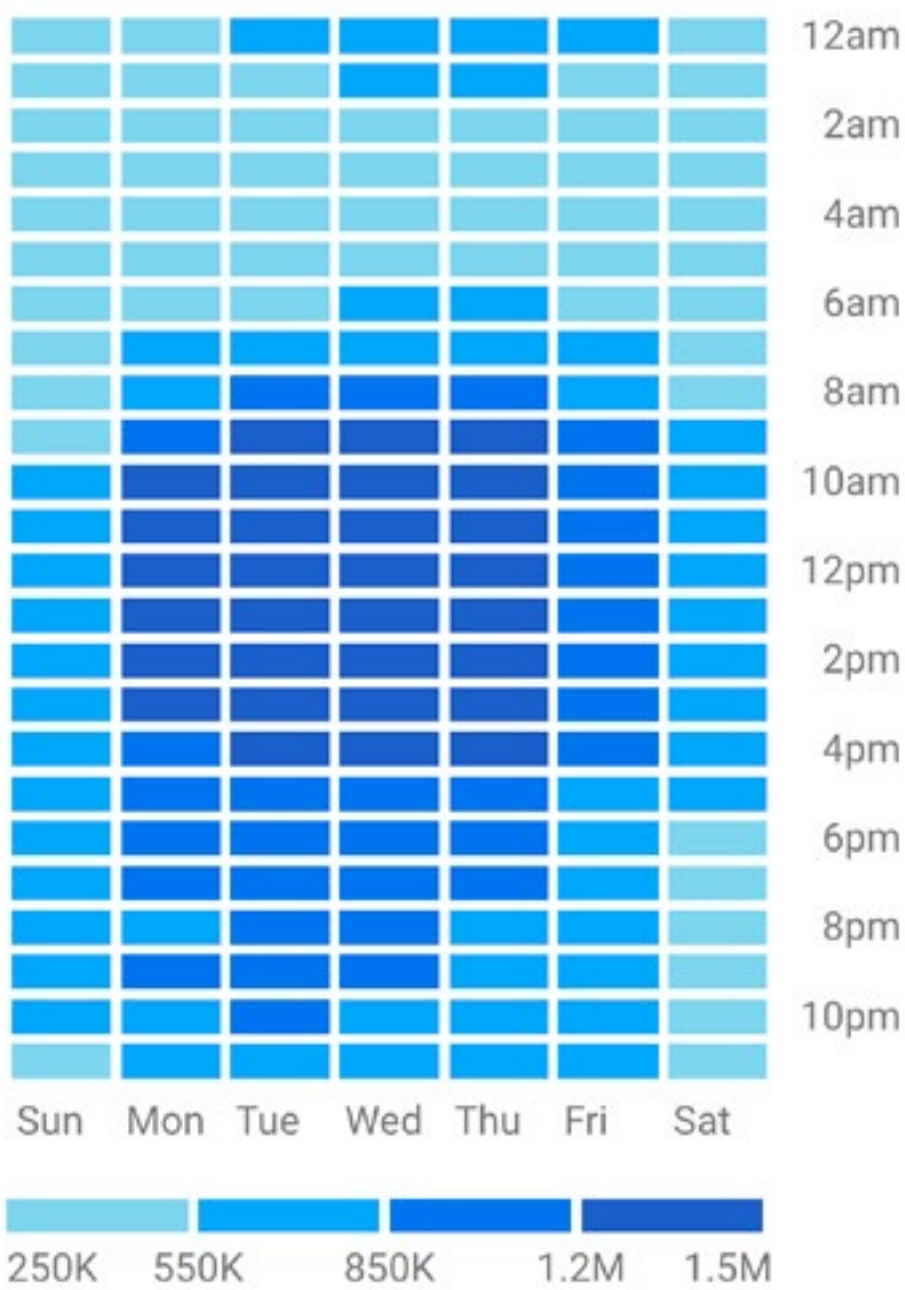
# When Should You Send a Press Release?

You’ve probably heard the “conventional wisdom” that it’s best to send out communications on Tuesdays. Studies have shown that it’s the most productive day of the week for most people, so the reasoning is sound. However, if you’ve heard this, it likely means many, many others have heard it as well. So, if we gave you one guess as to which day of the week is most popular to send a release, which day would you guess? That’s right, it’s Tuesday, which means that if you’re sending out releases on that day, your message is competing with almost everyone else’s.

When we analyzed site visits to PRNewswire.com and PR Newswire for Journalists (PRNJ) user logins, we discovered some interesting stats:

- PRNJ users are logged in to their accounts (and looking for press releases) mostly during business hours (9 a.m.-5 p.m.), with the peak occurring Monday through Thursday in the morning.
- While visits to PRNewswire.com are primarily concentrated during business hours Monday through Thursday, there are a high number of visits late in the evening on these days, as well as during business hours on Fridays.
- Assume that PRNewswire.com is a ghost town on weekends? Think again. People are visiting the site on Saturdays from 9 a.m.-5 p.m. and Sundays from 10 a.m.-10 p.m. in sizable amounts.

PR Newswire visitors by time of day (U.S. Data)



# Conclusion

Now that you know what's going on in the world of press releases, we hope you feel sufficiently armed to send out releases that get noticed and resonate with your target audience. While we can't guarantee that every release you send out will lead to headline news in earned media, if you follow our advice on how to structure your release and what to include, you are more likely to receive higher engagement from the audiences that matter most to you.

PR pros reiterated to us the value they get out of using press releases to share their company's most important news, and they've become an essential communication tool as the world has become more virtual.

Whether you're planning an entire communications strategy, brainstorming ways to create more buzz, or something in between, we hope this report serves as a guide to make your next press release more engaging and impactful.

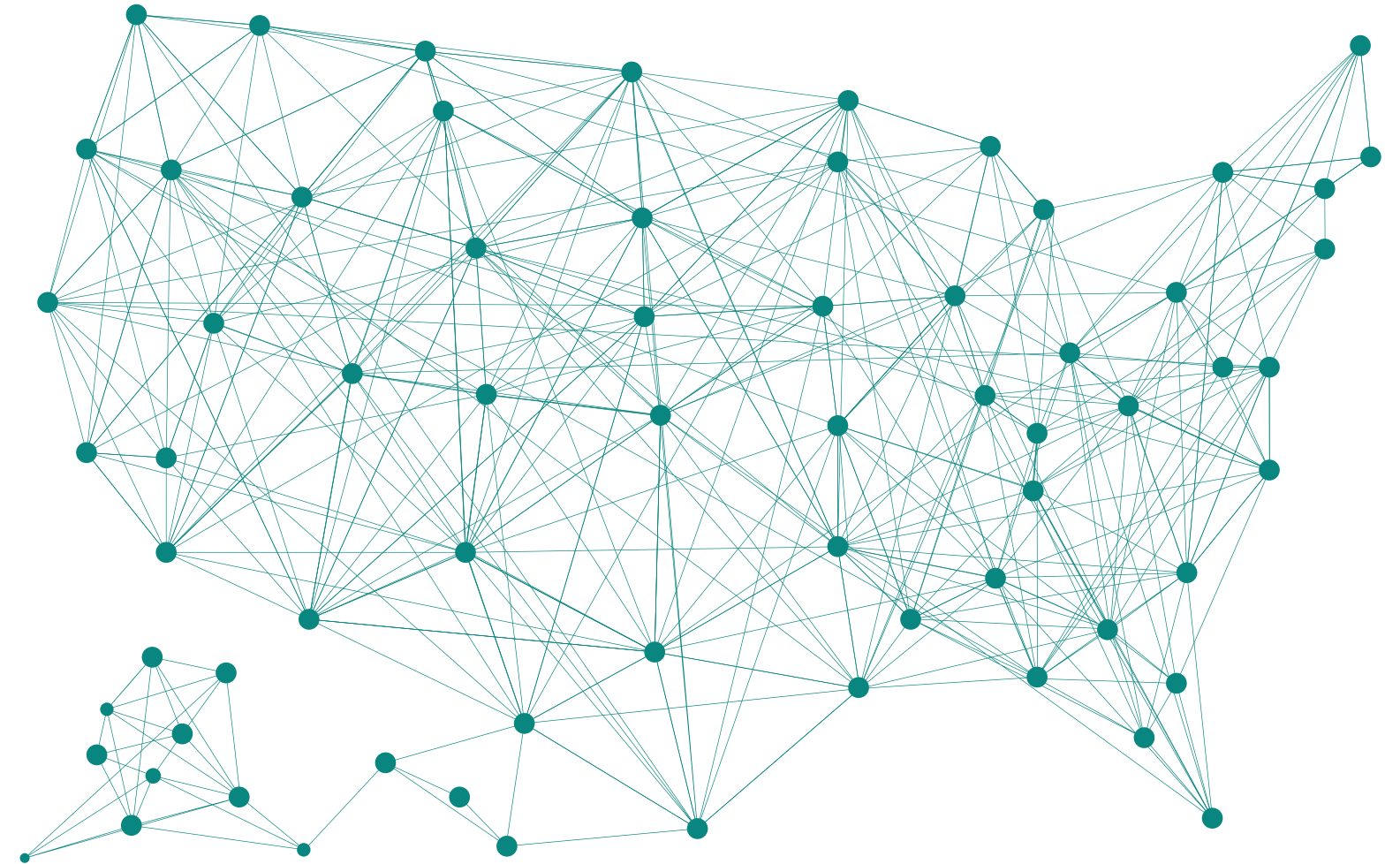


# Methodology

Cision's 2021 State of the Press Release results were pulled from U.S. press release data between June 2020 and May 2021.

We analyzed more than 100,000 press releases in the U.S. distributed through PR Newswire's distribution network during this time period. The data was collected using multiple sources including Google Analytics, Visibility Reports, and Cision's proprietary press release processing software. Additionally, subject trends were analyzed from June 2018 to May 2019 and June 2019 to May 2020.

Cision conducted its 2021 State of the Press Release survey from July 12 through August 4, 2021. This year's survey collected responses from 107 industry professionals across the United States whose organizations have previously sent press releases through PR Newswire.





# Additional Resources

Who doesn't like dessert after their meal? Here are a few more resources to make your press releases extra sweet.

## Anatomy of a (Nearly) Perfect Press Release

This infographic outlines the necessary components to include for a dynamic press release, from headline to CTA and everything in between.



## The Most Overused Press Release Words, According to Journalists

A list of words and phrases that have journalists hitting "delete" faster than you can say "best of breed" or "world-class."



## State of the Press Release LIVE

If you like this report, you're going to love this webinar featuring a panel of PR leaders discussing all things press release, and doling out expert tips and guidance. Register now or watch on demand.





As a global leader in PR, marketing and social media management technology and intelligence, Cision helps brands and organizations to identify, connect and engage with customers and stakeholders to drive business results. Cision, a network of approximately 1.1 billion influencers, in-depth monitoring, analytics and its Brandwatch and Falcon.io social media platforms headline a premier suite of solutions. Cision has offices in 24 countries throughout the Americas, EMEA and APAC.

For more information about Cision's award-winning solutions, including its next-gen Cision Communications Cloud®, visit [www.cision.ca](http://www.cision.ca) and follow [@CisionCA](https://twitter.com/CisionCA) on Twitter

### About Cision's Newswire Services

Powered by CNW, Cision provides simultaneous distribution of news releases and multimedia to media and financial markets and feeds websites as well as social media accounts and blogs. Our expertise in content distribution has made us a trusted and integral part of the Canadian media and market landscapes. As the market leader, Cision is the first place journalists and investors look for news releases from Canadian organizations, and it is the only service commercially endorsed by the TSX for newswire and financial webcast capabilities.

Cision has an unparalleled global reach of more than 200,000 publications and 10,000 websites and is available in more than 170 countries and 40 languages. PR Newswire for Journalists (PRNJ) is an exclusive community that includes over 20,000 journalists, bloggers and influencers who are logging into their PRNJ accounts specifically looking for story ideas. Cision thoroughly researches and vets this community to verify their identity as a member of the press, blogger or influencer. PRNJ users cover more than 200 beats and verticals.



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