

# **Czech Journalists Survey June 2003**

# Introduction

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The term “media relations” can probably be found among the services offered by all PR agencies. Judging by their criticism of each other, however, the relationship between journalists and PR executives is a somewhat unbalanced one. Although PR agencies believe their aim is to serve journalists as a source of information, some of them claim they can get by without them. Happily. This begs the question: Why?

Why shouldn't relations between journalists and PR executives be correct? Why do they suspect each other of behaving badly? Why do some PR executives sell their goods under the counter and after closing? Why do some journalists spurn transparently submitted and verifiable information just because it's from a PR agency that has signed the press release? This is the reason we conducted this research into opinions of Czech print media representatives. In it we focused on one of the most common methods used by companies and PR agencies to communicate with journalists – the press release.

I have always claimed that a PR agency's job is to serve print and electronic media only as a supplementary source of information, which the media should, and perhaps even must use as they see fit. If this is to happen, however, nobody can interfere with communication between PR agencies and journalists.

I would like to thank all the journalists who took advantage of this opportunity and shared their opinions with us. I sincerely hope that it is the first step towards improving relations, deepening trust and mutual respect between journalists and respectable PR executives.

**Michal Donath**  
**Donath-Burson-Marsteller**

Prague, July 2003

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# Methodology

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## Aims:

- To obtain information about how print and electronic media use supplementary information sources, such as press releases.
- To representatively assess how widespread the use of electronic communication is, in comparison with traditional methods.
- To contribute to an improvement in relations between journalists and PR executives.

## Research in an International Context

This research is the first internet research into journalists' attitudes in the Czech Republic conducted by Donath-Burson-Marsteller. Research was also done into journalists' attitudes in Slovakia. The research is comparable with a poll of journalists' attitudes in Great Britain conducted for [Burson-Marsteller](#) by [The Survey Shop](#) in 2002.

## Survey System

The research was conducted using Donath-Burson-Marsteller's own internet-based survey system, which enables the immediate creation of questionnaires and the distribution of personalised requests for participation in the research, for the purpose of collecting statistically relevant data.

## Sample

In order to select a representative sample of journalists working for the most influential printed media, 751 journalists were asked to participate in the research. Because of the different nature of the work, television and radio journalists were not included in the sample. Replies were gathered using a questionnaire available on the internet which could only be accessed by the invited respondents.

Media and sector	N	n	n (% of N)
Czech News Wire	32	8	25.00%
Dailies	323	64	19.81%
Economic weeklies	56	20	35.71%
IT media	53	21	39.62%
Trade press (media, PR)	26	10	38.46%
Regional media (VLP)	211	30	14.22%
General interest weeklies	50	5	10.00%
Total:	751	158	21.04%

Legend: N = total population of journalists, n = sample

## Respondents

The respondents were journalists who published at least one article between April and June 2003 and have an editorial staff e-mail address. The survey was carried out between 23<sup>rd</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> June 2003. The percentage of respondents (21%) is higher than the minimum required percentage for internet surveys (15%).

## Free Distribution

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# As Dead As Fax

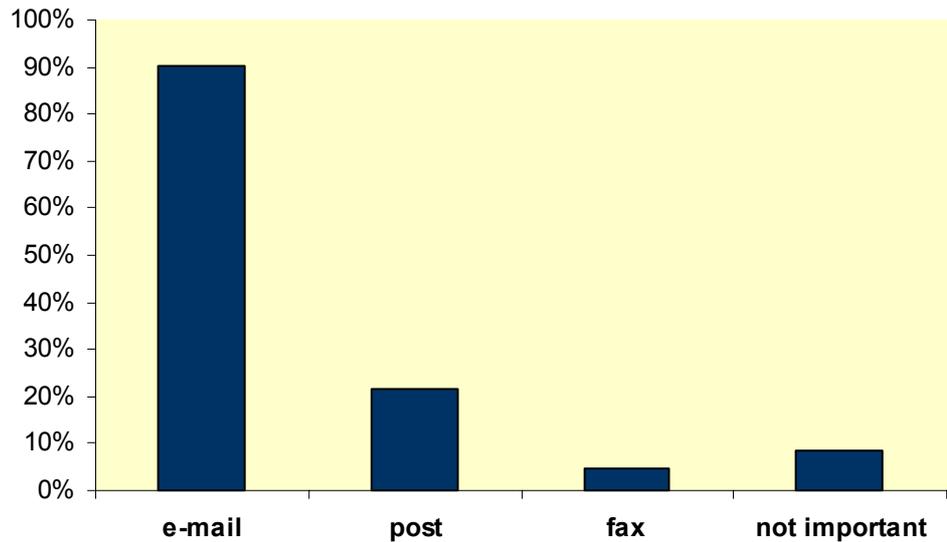
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## Preferred Forms of Communication

What form of press releases and invitations to press conferences do journalists prefer? The respondents chose from the following options, including combinations of them:

*“What bothers us most is the repetitious calls from PR executives asking us if we have received an e-mail or letter.”*

Markéta  
Grosmanová  
Hospodářské  
noviny



**Chart 1: 90% of journalists prefer e-mail or a combination of e-mail and other methods of communication, whereas only two percent of journalists prefer post. None of the journalists preferred fax on its own.**

## Move with the Times

E-mail can serve as the prime method of delivering press releases and invitations to 98 percent of journalists (the figure includes respondents who prefer e-mail and those for whom the form is not important). Old-timers can confirm that press releases were mostly distributed by fax only five years ago.

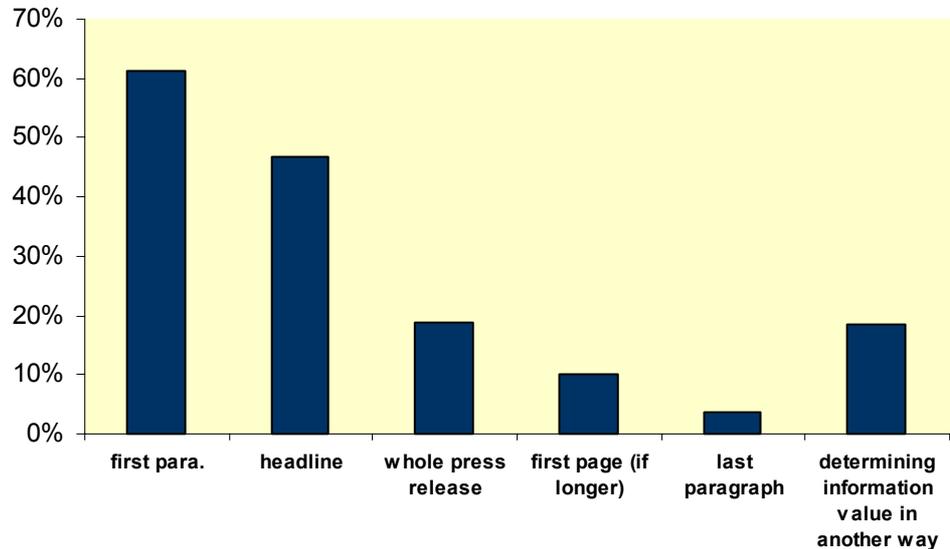
# Selective Reading

## Making Decisions

What part of a press release does a journalist usually read before deciding whether it contains information he can work with?

***“I extract the hard data from a press release and ignore the rest.”***

Petr Blažek  
Ekonom



**Chart 2: Only a third of journalists (31%) read more than the headline or the first paragraph of a press release to form an opinion on whether the release contains newsworthy information or not.**

***“I usually know what to expect from who.”***

Petr Němec  
Hospodářské  
noviny

## Bet on a Stone-cold Certainty

Important information should not be in the last paragraph. Only a small percentage of journalists (19%) read all press releases to the end before deciding whether to bin them straight away. One in ten journalists has “another way” of determining their news value. But you cannot rely on that.

Even less journalists (18%) get beyond the first paragraph in Great Britain than in the Czech Republic.

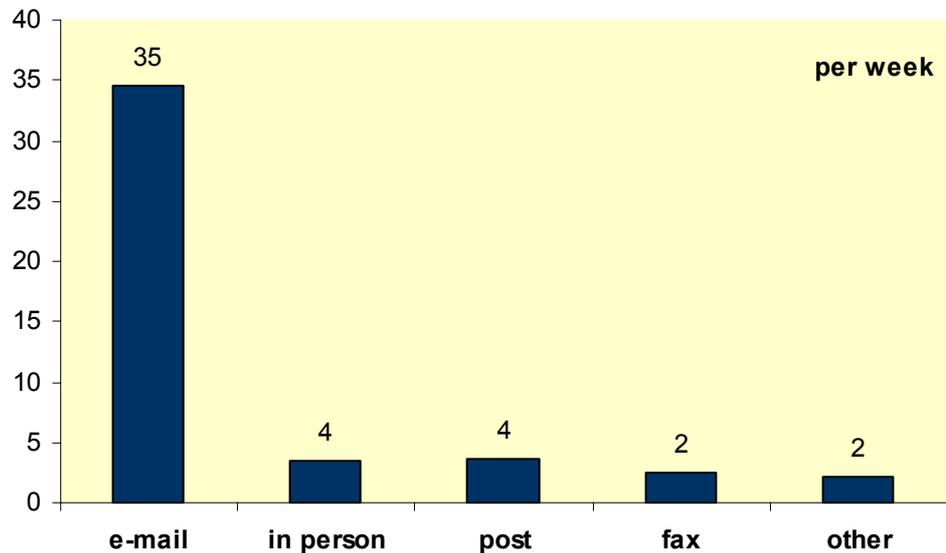
# Lovely SPAM

## The Journey of a Press Release

Press releases are sent to journalists in various ways. How many do they get a week on average?

*"I throw a lot of press releases into the bin."*

Markéta  
Grosmanová  
Hospodářské  
noviny



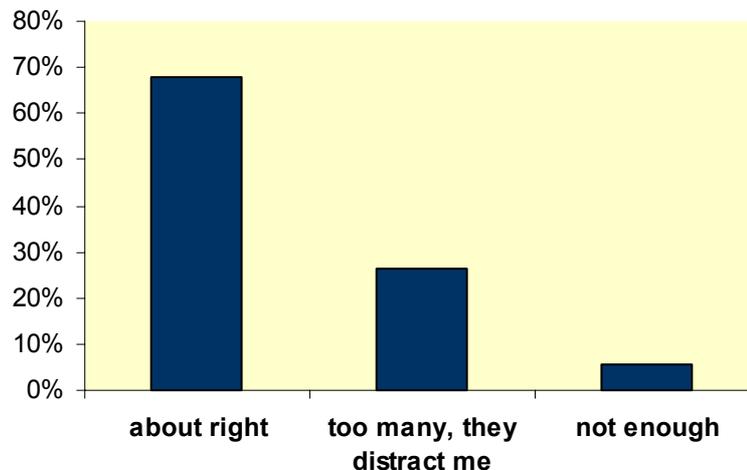
**Chart 3: On average a journalist receives 46 press releases a week. Almost all journalists (98.7%) get press releases by e-mail.**

## Variability

Journalist responses ranged from none to 330 press releases received per week. A typical journalist receives 15 to 30 press releases a week. A journalist in Great Britain receives 185 a week, which is four times more than in the Czech Republic.

## Too Little or Too Much?

The amount of press releases journalists receive is:



**Chart 4: Two thirds of journalists (68%) are satisfied with the quantity of press releases they receive. Six percent want even more. The remaining 26 percent would like to see less of them in their inbox.**

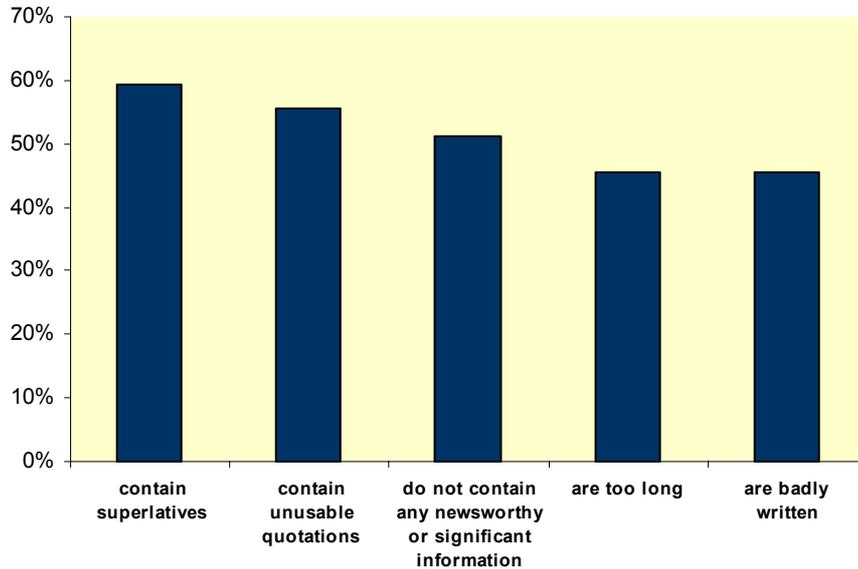
# Critical Eye

## In General about Press Releases

Journalists estimated what ratio of press releases had the following defects:

***“Press Releases are poorly written.”***

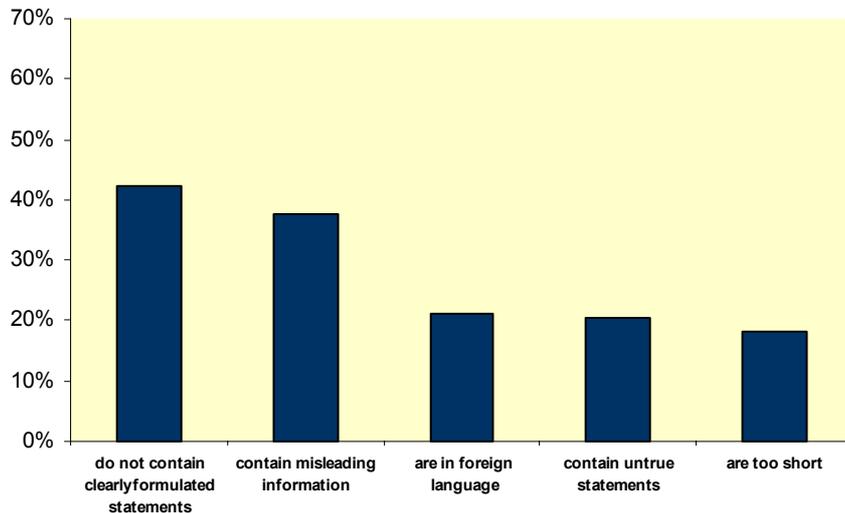
Petr Němec  
Hospodářské  
noviny



**Chart 5: On average 59 percent of press releases contain superlatives. However, what is more important is that journalists claim an average of half (51%) of all press releases do not contain any newsworthy information.**

***“Good things sell easy; but as a rule I very rarely receive a press release about an interesting thing.”***

Martina  
Coufalová  
Strategie



**Chart 6: According to journalists, a fifth (21%) of press releases contain untrue statements. A fifth (18%) of releases seem to be too short to them.**

### Comparison

In Great Britain journalists stated that, on average, 62 percent of press releases do not contain any newsworthy information.

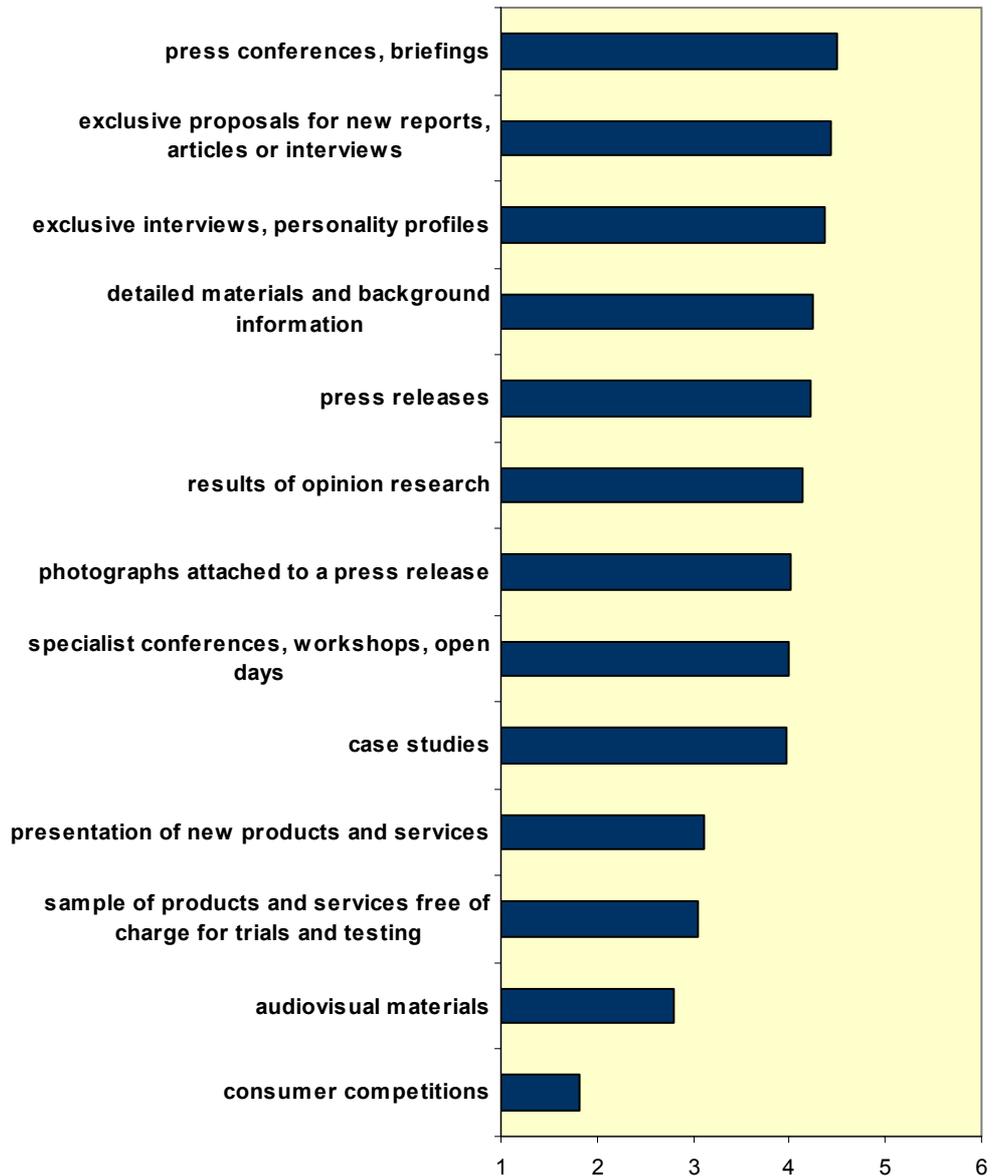
# Journalists about PR Tools

## Objective Assessment

We ascertained how useful the following tools and forms of communication are for journalists on a scale of 1 (completely useless) to 6 (very useful):

***"I avoid PR agencies, unless they provide otherwise unavailable information."***

Emil Szirmai,  
Ekonom



**Chart 7: The score is the average value. IT media journalists gave a significantly higher mark to samples of products and services free of charge for trials and testing (average for IT media: 5.6), thereby rating this PR tool significantly better than other journalists (average for all: 3).**

## Individual Approach

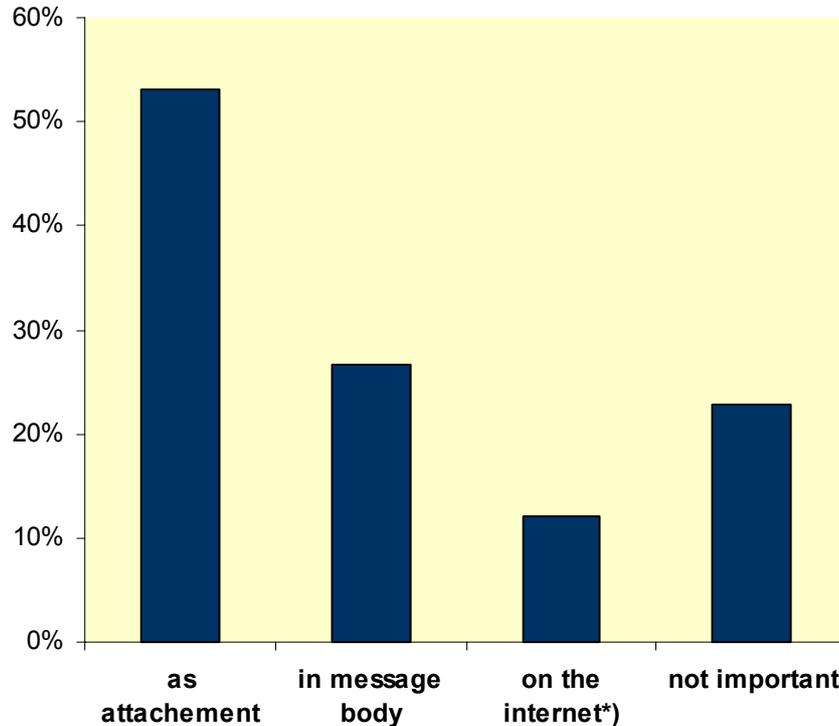
Journalists working in different sectors and sections view the use of PR tools in different ways. This corresponds to their needs and focus.

# Body or Attachment?

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## E-mail Wrap

What is the best way to send a press release by e-mail? What form do journalists prefer?



\*) e-mail contains a URL to the text of the press release

**Chart 8: Most journalists (53%) prefer to receive press releases as an attachment. No journalist said he would prefer only those press releases that would form a part of the body of an e-mail.**

## Diversity of E-mails

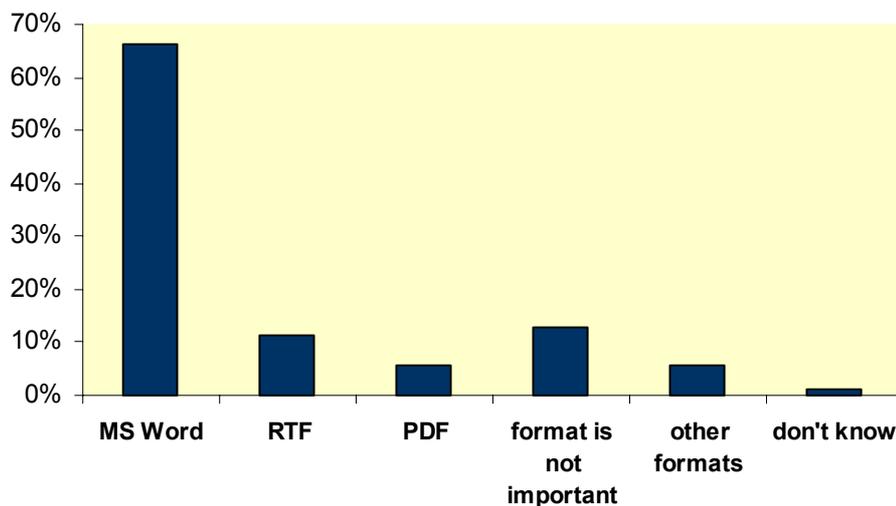
Czech journalists, in contrast to their colleagues in Great Britain, prefer to receive press releases as an attachment, rather than in the body of an e-mail. This is evidently because their computers do not always correctly display accents and paragraphing does not always work reliably. 55 percent of journalists in Great Britain prefer press releases in the body of an e-mail.

# Monopoly on Format

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## One Ring To Rule Them All

If an e-mail contains a press release in the attachment, what format to journalists prefer?



**Chart 9: Eight out of ten journalists (78%) prefer Microsoft formats (MS Word and RTF). If we include those that said the format is not important, then almost all journalists (90%) can work with attachments in Microsoft formats.**

## One Ring to Bind Them

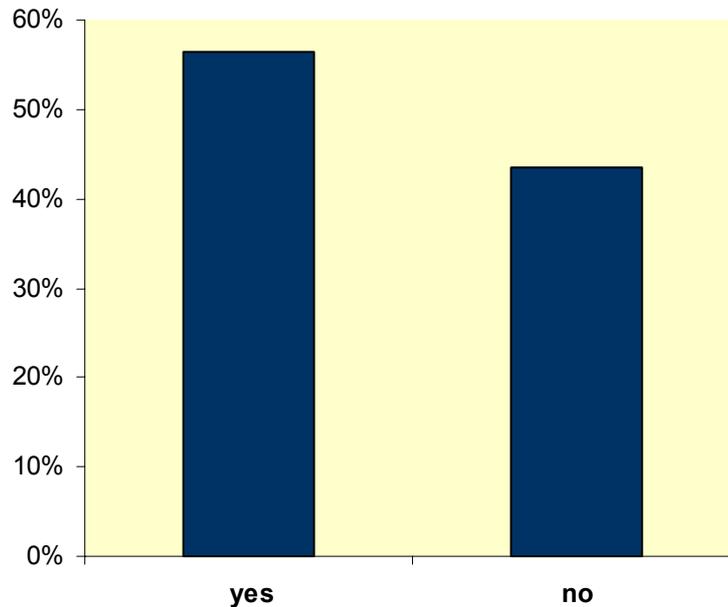
The main characteristic common to all Czech editorial staffs is the unification of the format of the files they work with. This reflects the state on the word processor market, which is dominated by Microsoft and its MS Office software suite. Despite this, six percent of journalists prefer PDF format.

# Central e-Mail? Targeting Pays Off!

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## Group E-mail Addresses

Do journalists use press releases delivered to central e-mail addresses?



**Chart 10: There are more journalists who use press releases delivered to a central e-mail address than those who do not use such releases. But only six percent more.**

## Event Horizon

A total of 44 percent of journalists do not work with press releases delivered to central e-mail addresses. This could be because of the way the press releases are distributed to the editorial staff. For example, in Czech News Wire (ČTK) all respondents work with such releases.

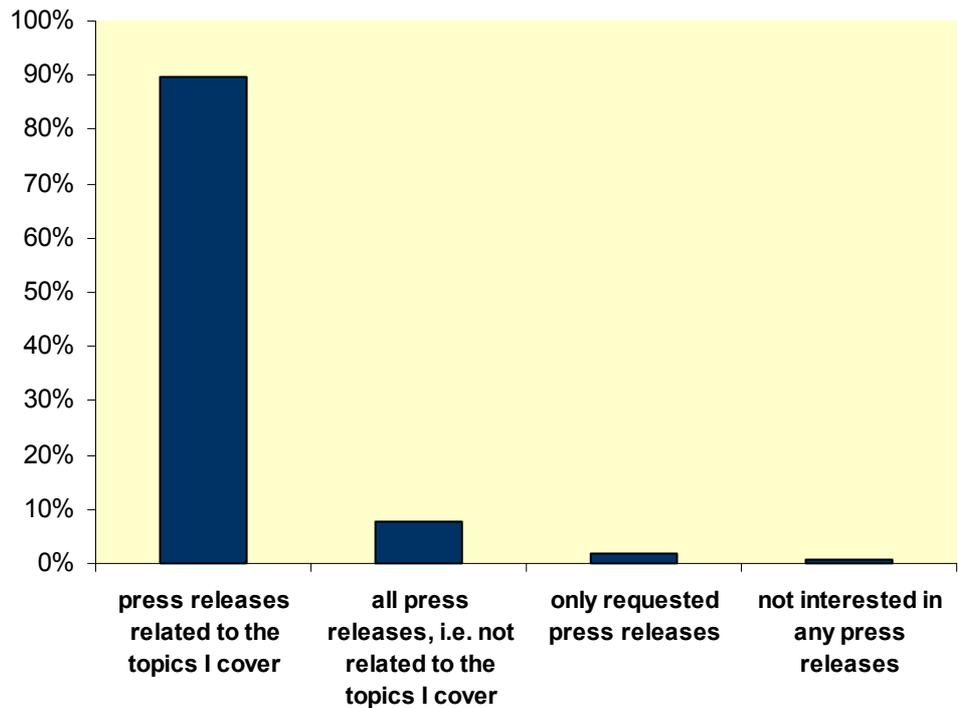
# Each To His Own

## Topics and Journalists

Do journalists not like being sent press releases? What sort of press releases are they interested in?

*“Agencies and other organisers carpet bomb editorial staffs with news, rather than selecting the topic-relevant reporters.”*

Petr Němec  
Hospodářské  
noviny



**Chart 11: Almost all journalists (90%) are interested only in press releases related to the topics they work with. Some (8%), however, are interested in all of them.**

## The Rocky Reef of Distribution

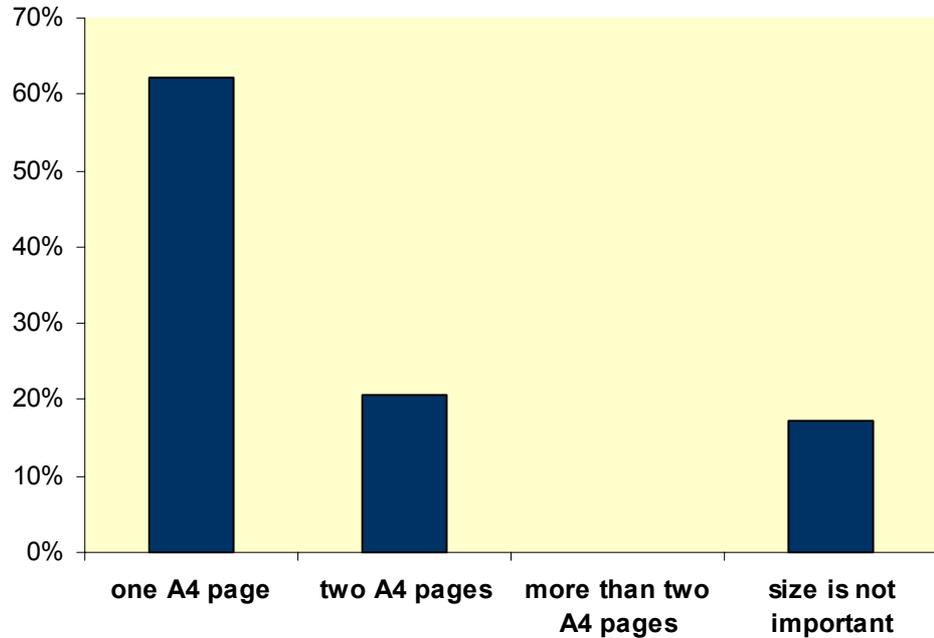
As the vast majority of journalists only require press releases related to the topics they work with and, in addition, half of journalists do not work with press releases delivered to central e-mail addresses, it is necessary to create thorough and complex distribution lists with the names of addressees of press releases. This, however, will also mean more unsolicited e-mails in future, as such lists will age rapidly.

# One Page Rule

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## Waste Not

Can the size of a press release annoy a journalist? What size is ideal?



**Chart 12: Most journalists (62%) believe that one A4 page is enough for a press release. A sixth (17%) think that size is not important.**

## Want Not

Almost all journalists (83%) believe that a press release should not have more than two A4 pages. It would seem that the original purpose – rapid and effective communication – gets lost in long press releases.

# In Press Release We Trust

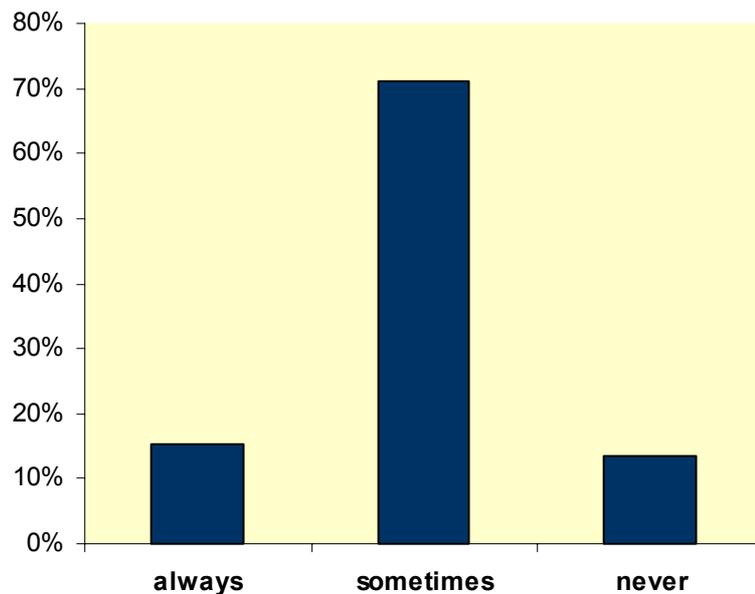
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## Low Awareness

Are journalists aware of the possible misuse of a sender's identity for the distribution of press releases? Do they verify the identity or authenticity of press releases?

*"If I did 'common' journalism and wrote, for example, about politics, I would probably verify everything."*

Dagmar Ruščáková,  
independent IT reporter



**Chart 13: Only a few journalists (15%) always verify the sender's identity or the authenticity of a press release. The rest only do it sometimes (71%) or not at all (14%).**

*"We are interested, in checking things, in the readers' interest."*

Milan Slezák  
Hospodářské noviny

## Too Much Trust

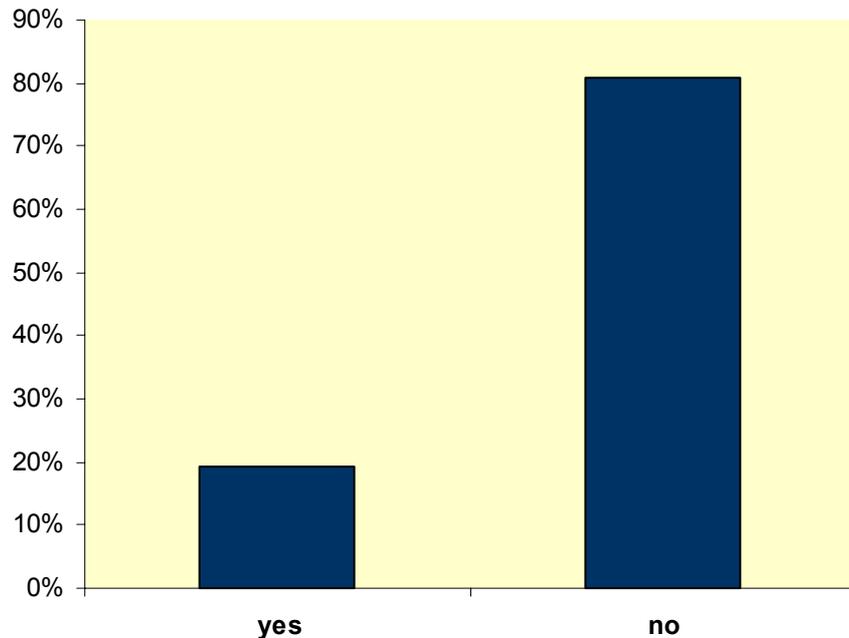
Due to its simplicity and large volume, electronic communication is a potential danger for the media in the event the sender and the content of a press release are not genuine. The danger of publishing misleading information or hoaxes is present.

# Cell Text Messages? Not Yet!

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## Trends

Are journalists interested in being notified of press releases and conferences by cell phone text messages?



**Chart 14: Only a fifth of journalists (19%) expressed an interest in receiving informative text messages.**

## E-mail! What next?

Mobile phone penetration in the Czech Republic is high. There is also great awareness of the use of mobile services other than telephone calls. Despite this, only 19 percent of journalists can imagine text messages as a means of communication about current press releases and invitations to press conferences.

# On the Catwalk

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## Concept

Using the information obtained during the research, we attempted to create a typical Czech print journalist based on the average values. Any similarity to real persons is purely coincidental.

## The typical journalist:

- Is more likely to be a man than a woman (a third – 31 percent – of respondents were women);
- Prefers press releases to be delivered by e-mail;
- Reads the first paragraph of a press release to determine its information value;
- Receives 46 press releases a week;
- Believes that more than half of all press releases are packed with superlatives, unusable quotes and do not contain any newsworthy information;
- Values press conferences and exclusive proposals for articles and interviews most of all, but also welcomes detailed background material, press releases and the results of opinion research;
- Does not need audiovisual materials or the results of consumer competitions for his work;
- Welcomes press releases in an attachment to an e-mail in MS Word format;
- Certainly does not read all the press releases delivered to a central e-mail address;
- Is mostly interested in press releases related to the topics he works with;
- Won't even look at a press release longer than one A4 page;
- Trusts e-mails; he only verifies their authenticity occasionally;
- Does not want to receive notifications by text messages.

## Reality

No model Czech journalist exists and each of the journalists has his or her specific needs. Despite this, they have some common characteristics and requirements or opinions on PR tools. Czech journalists are usually very critical of them. At the end of the day, Czech PR agencies and other companies that communicate with journalists are not regarded particularly highly, although this is pretty much the same as in Britain, for example.

# Contact

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If you are interested in more information about the research or the services offered by Donath-Burson-Marsteller, please contact Jiří Šebek (GSM: +420 602 661 336, [jiri\\_sebek@cz.bm.com](mailto:jiri_sebek@cz.bm.com)) or Michal Donath (GSM: +420 602 222 128, [michal\\_donath@cz.bm.com](mailto:michal_donath@cz.bm.com)). You can find information about DBM at: <http://www.dbm.cz/>. The company has been building public relations in the Czech Republic and Slovakia since 1991.