CISION

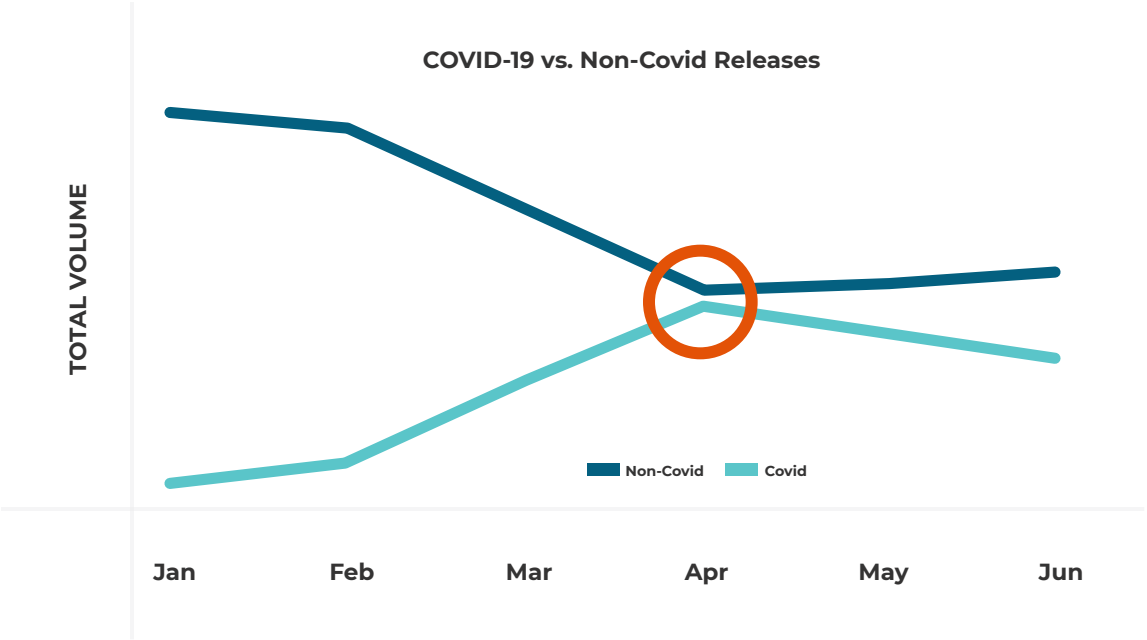
2020 STATE OF THE PRESS RELEASE

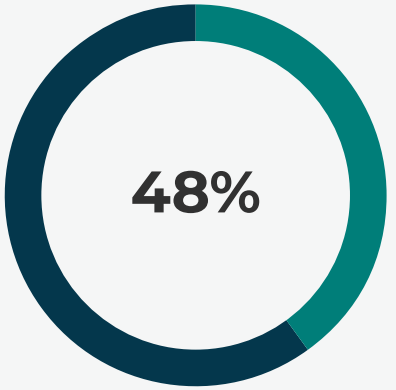
Following our 2020 State of the Media Report, we at Cision thought that our customers and the industry would be interested in more specifics around The State of the Press Release, especially given the challenging and unique environment we're all in.

With that in mind, we dug into more than 100,000 press releases distributed through PR Newswire's global distribution network from June 2019-June 2020. You can see full details in our Methodology section at the end. COVID-19 obviously left nothing untouched in our lives, and that includes the press release.

How COVID-19 Changed the Press Release

As the virus spread more rapidly around the world, we saw a huge increase in COVID-19 related press releases coupled with a significant drop in non-COVID-19 press releases, as might be expected. Brands everywhere were scrambling to communicate their plan to employees, customers and stakeholders, internally and externally. The public was eager to learn what steps were being taken for both their own safety and the safety of those employed by brands around the world.





of total press releases put out by Cision March-May mentioned COVID-19.

The monthly breakdown was:

- 33% of all copy crossing the PR Newswire network in June mentioned COVID-19

- 42% did in May

- 47% in April, and

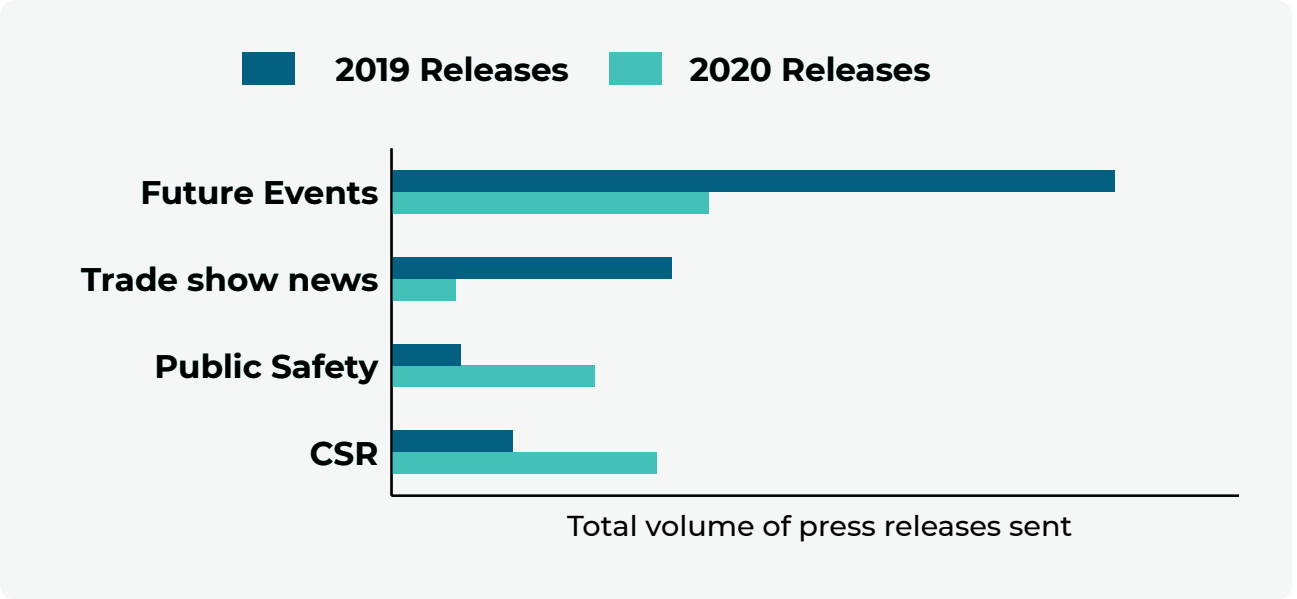
- 31% in March

KEY TAKEAWAY

Largest spike in COVID-copy was in April 2020.

As the year progresses, we expect this normalising trend of copy less focused on the pandemic (whether a public company reporting the impact on business outlook or new product marketing endeavors) to continue.

During March-May, though, what were press releases about? When we broke it down by subject, we found some huge jumps in some subjects vs. huge declines in others compared to the same categories in 2019.



- Future events –56%
- Trade show news –77%
- Public safety +192%
- Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) +118%

Looking by industry, travel press releases were down 36% while infectious disease control saw a massive jump, up 3,140%.

KEY TAKEAWAY

As in-person events were forced to cancel or go virtual, we saw a large decrease in event and tradeshow news, along with travel news. Meanwhile news about Public Safety, Corporate Social Responsibility and Infectious Disease Control and Healthcare saw large spikes, as might be expected.

On Timing

We often get asked what the best time is to send out a press release and while there is no one-size-fits-all answer, brands can use the data we have on when releases are sent out to make the best decisions for their own future announcements based on factors like their industry and more.

A high volume of news is sent at 1PM BST Monday - Thursday, with a spike on Tuesdays. This does not necessarily mean that is a good time to send news; in fact, in order to stand out from the rest, choose an off-time before or after 8AM ET.

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
5am							
6am							
7am							
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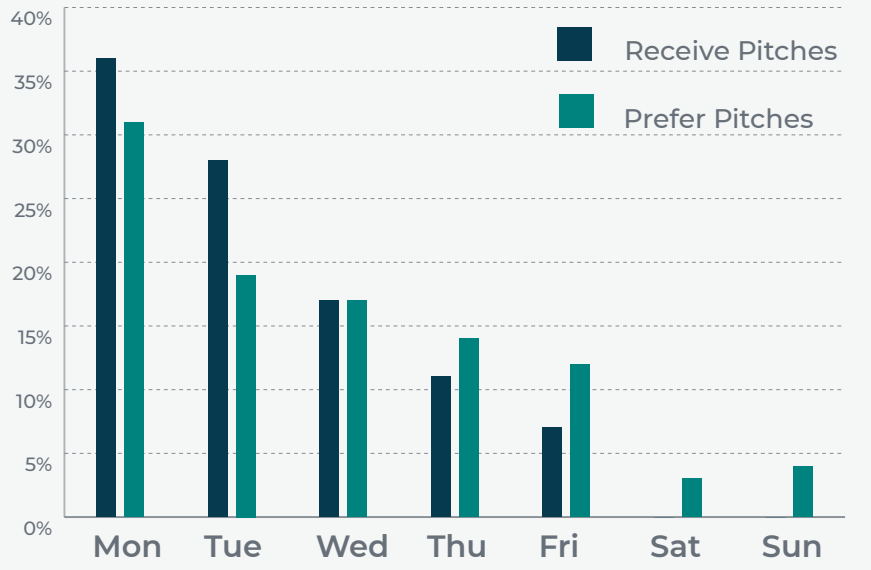
KEY TAKEAWAY

While there's no right or wrong time to send a press release, if you're looking to maximize your visibility, the best time to send is Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday in the middle of the day, and you should avoid the top of the hour.

If we break press releases down further to looking by the minute, we find that 52% of copy is sent on the hour and half hour. Much like Tuesdays having the highest volume of releases, this does not necessarily mean it is the best time to send. To avoid high volume times- and therefore getting lost in the mix- send at an off-time like 10:13 or 10:47.

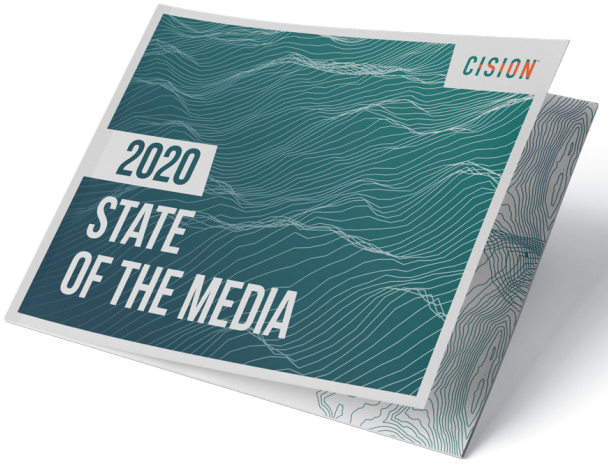
Compare this to when journalists like to receive pitches, straight from our 2020 State of the Media Report:



Note:Reporters selected all days of the week that applied.

"For the first time in Cision's State of the Media Report history, we asked reporters to share what days they receive pitches most and what days they actually prefer getting them. As many of us expected, Mondays proved to be the preferred day for reporters, and it was also when they got pitches most. However, many journalists reported they were still open to receiving pitches until Friday (a handful even on Saturday and Sunday). As the week progresses though, the number of pitches they receive declines. While their interest in receiving pitches did slightly decrease, the numbers weren't so significant that it should prevent publicists from reaching out."

– SOTM Report 2020



WHAT ABOUT IR RELEASES?

We looked at IR releases on their own to see if the timing was different and we found that it was; the highest IR copy volume is around 9PM BST – every weekday with the highest volume of IR copy sent on Tuesday or Wednesday. Additionally, the early morning hours leading up to the 9:30 AM ET market-open experience an influx of news.

Again, the takeaway is to time your release differently in order to stand out, and if you're not a public company disseminating material news, avoid market-open and market-close.

WHAT ABOUT PRESS RELEASE VIEWS?

Just knowing when press releases are sent doesn't give us enough information to make the best decision on when to send; knowing when they are most often viewed is an important key metric.

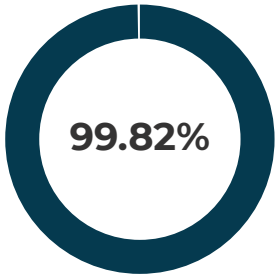
Looking at this data we found that the highest views on press release copy are seen on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. Therefore, to maximise press release visibility, it's recommended to distribute early-to-midweek to give your press release time to circulate during this high-visibility time.

Press release benchmarks

It's important to understand the benchmarks around press releases to better inform your strategy and the work our teams do to ensure press release accuracy.

24/7/365, the PR Newswire editorial staff is partnering with our customers to review, process, and distribute their press release content. Every year, hundreds of thousands of releases are submitted, and every release is carefully reviewed to ensure accuracy.

ACCURACY



We define "accuracy" as it relates to press release distribution as the rate at which we accurately distributed releases in a given month.

That means that our editorial team uses their expertise to proofread every release before it is sent out and circulated to the media. Because of this, we can catch mistakes in copy that may not have been caught otherwise. Our accuracy rate for the entire year was above 99.82% every month, and we are proud of this number.

CATCHES

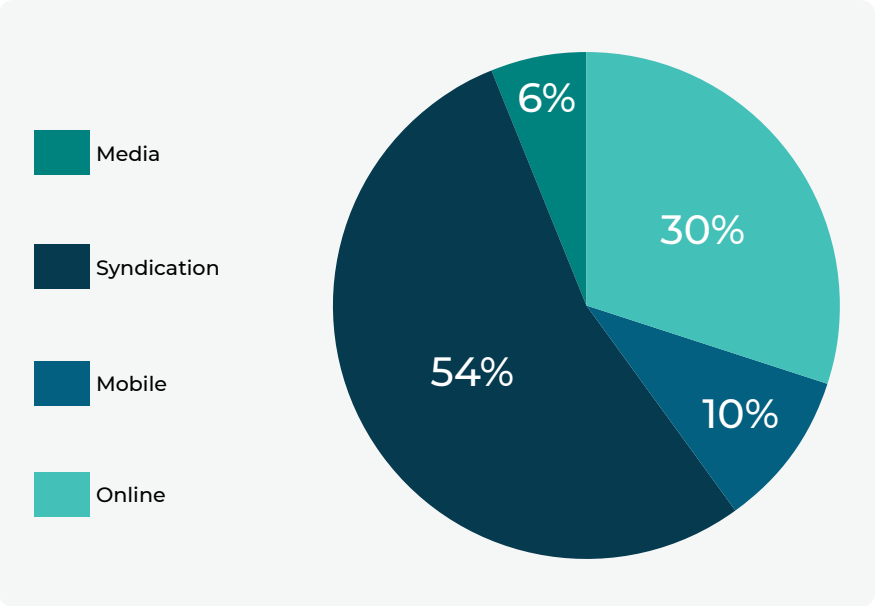
For the full year, we made nearly 40,000 catches on client copy. Every month, our editorial team made more than 2,400 catches on client copy. And to be clear, those are catches found *after* clients sent their final version, making it a very necessary step to have our expert team review copies before they are sent out.

What kinds of catches do they make? Some examples:

- Hyperlink errors
- Incorrect dateline dates
- Day/date discrepancies
- Misspellings
- Punctuation errors

WHERE DO AUDIENCES READ PRESS RELEASES?

In order to design a press release that's going to perform effectively, it helps to keep in mind where your audience will be reading it. Do they prefer one kind of device over an another? Is the multimedia you want to include with your release going to be the best experience on that device?



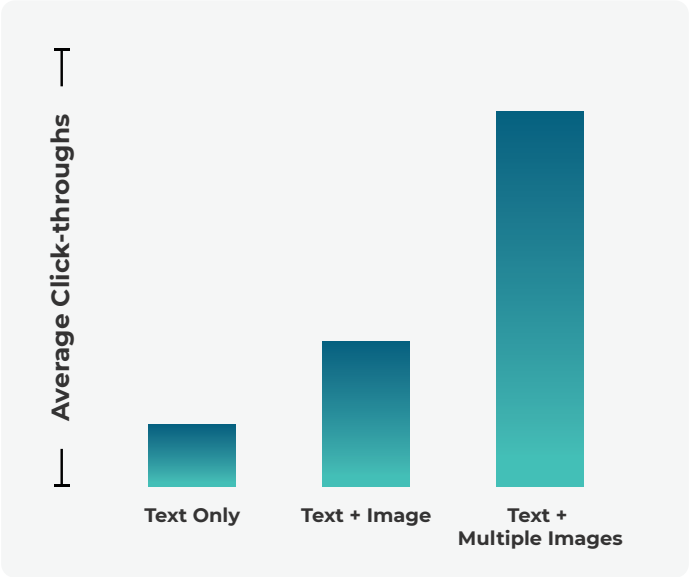
Decide what will work the best to tell your story for your audience where they like to view it best.

Not sure if multimedia is a good idea?

We found that adding multimedia increases the views on a piece of news. Always include a multimedia asset with every press release that it makes sense to do so.

But we also know that views don't necessarily equal engagement—however the data also showed that including multimedia has shown to increase engagement with a piece of news. Therefore, our advice stays the same: Always include a multimedia asset with every press release that makes sense to. (And in today's hyper-connected world full of stimulation, there are few stories that wouldn't benefit from being told in a multi-sensory way.)

If you don't think you have a piece of multimedia content, think again. Often your social media channels (think Facebook or YouTube) or your own website are full of compelling visual content you can repurpose with a press release. Still having trouble tracking down an image? Take advantage of PR Newswire's partnership with Shutterstock. You'll have access to over 200M royalty-free stock images to add with your next press release.

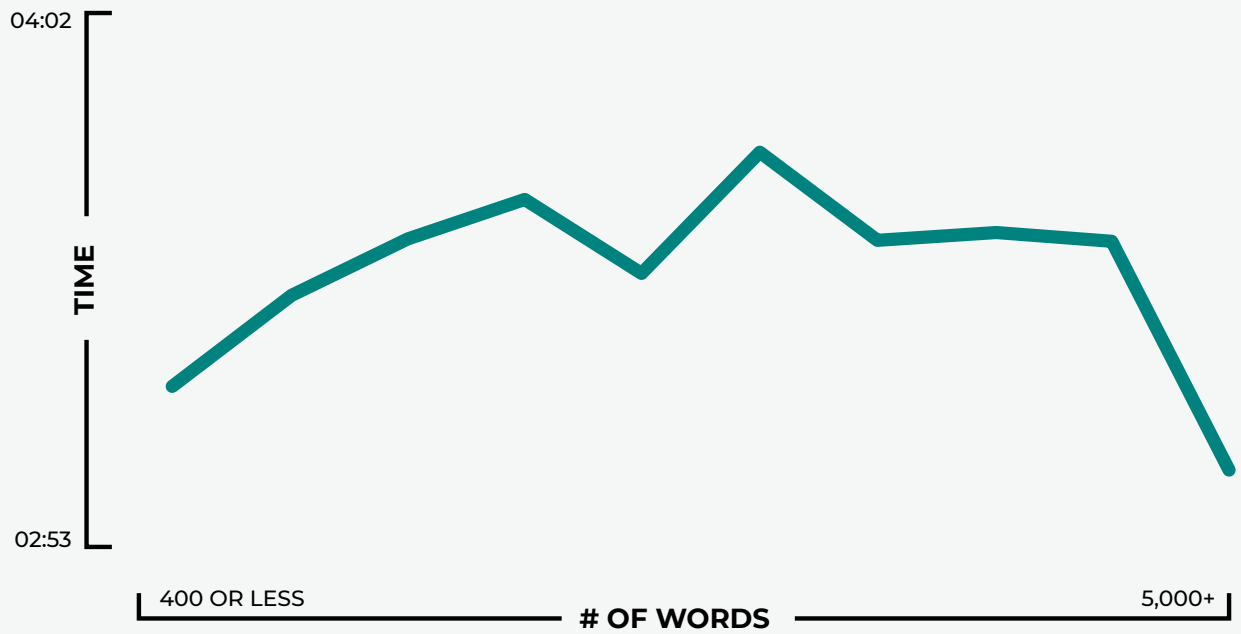


HOW LONG ARE PRESS RELEASES?

A press release should be longer than a tweet and shorter than *War and Peace*, but there is a lot of territory between those two markers. We found that the majority of releases were 400 words or less, so that's a good benchmark to aim for. Overall, the average length of a press release is 686 words.

Curious if a longer press release means people will spend longer reading it?

As with most things in life, there is a limit to the return on this strategy with a sharp drop-off in reading time for very long press releases.



If you have that much to say, consider how it can best be said: Put a summary version with the highlights in your press release and direct your audience to another source of content (or even several, depending on what you're trying to share and the formats that are best for it) for the rest of the story.

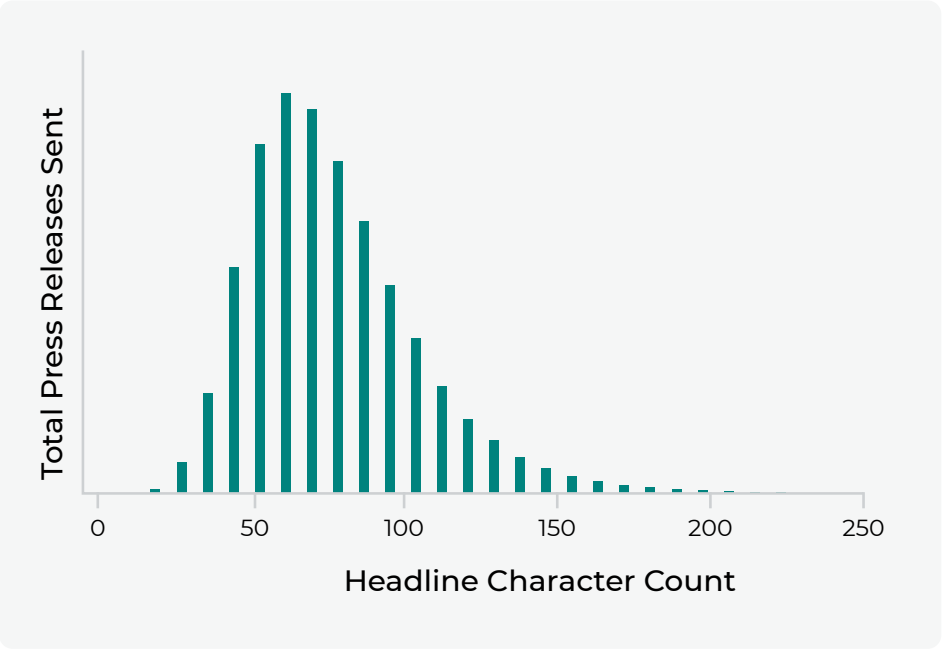
Readers like short, easy-to-consume pieces of content. Sometimes a longer press release is necessary, however, such as with earnings releases or research reports. To keep your audience's attention if your press release is longer, break up the text with bullets, headers, and lists.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Press Releases are informative and engaging. The average time spent reading a press release is 3 minutes and 39 seconds.

WHAT ABOUT HEADLINE LENGTH?

A catchy– not click-baity– headline can do a lot to capture audience attention. The average headline length for a press release is 88 characters. Keep headlines short and sweet, and for a longer headline keep the important keywords towards the beginning in the first 70 characters. This is where Google search engine results cut off headlines and email subject lines cut off.

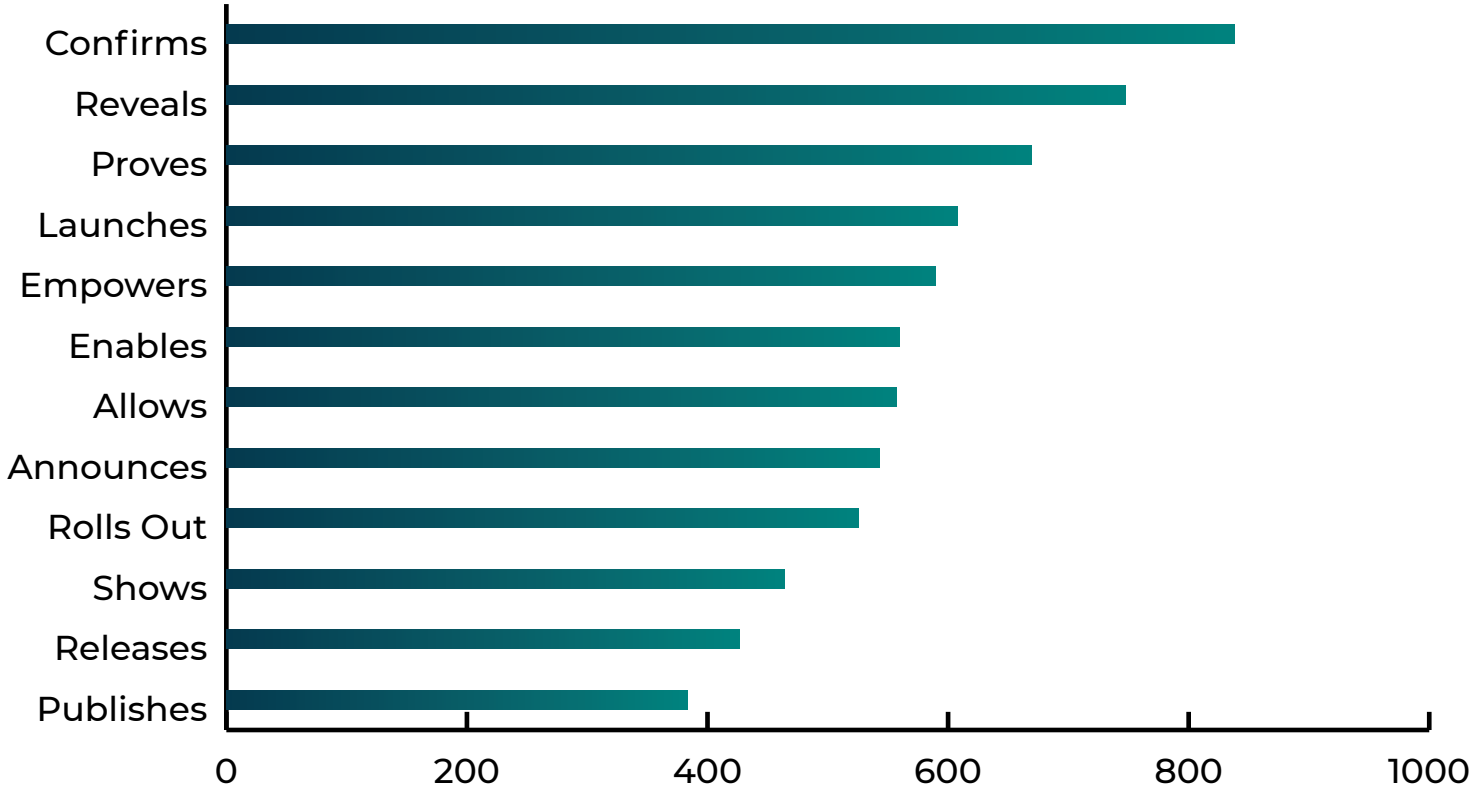


When it comes to headline keywords, we put together the most used words in a headline sent through PR Newswire:

KEY TAKEAWAY

Headlines are the first and often only thing your audience will read. Be bold and direct, get creative, and test different headlines to maximise success.

Our final piece of advice comes to headlines and using action words: Releases with these words in the headline garnered the most views.



We all remember our lessons about writing in the active voice vs. the passive, right?

Conclusion

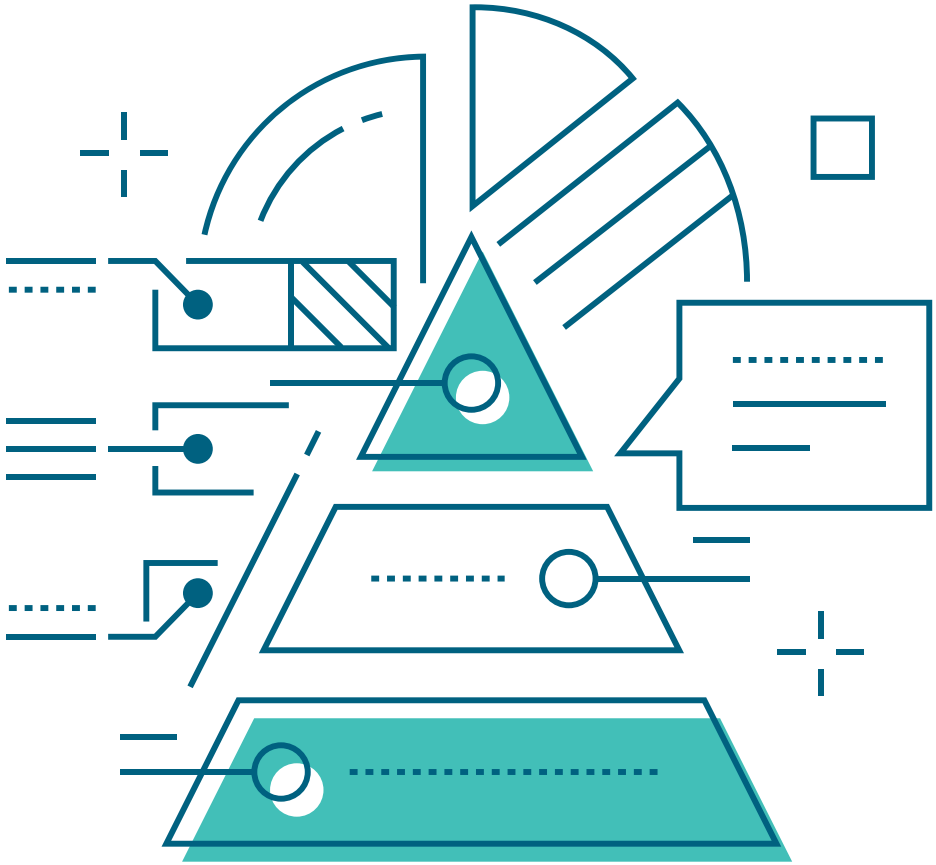
We hope this data around press release best practices helps you craft the best possible releases for your brand going forward. Remember that you know your brand best and should use this information coupled with that knowledge to craft the best strategy; sometimes you must know the rules to break them in the right ways to get the best results.

We won't try to predict the impact COVID-19 will have on press releases (or anything else) in the coming months, but encourage you to keep the general state of the world in mind when you're crafting releases as well.

And if you have questions, you can always find us to learn more at cision.co.uk.

Methodology

Cision's State of the Press Release results were developed from press release data between June 2019 - May 2020. We analysed more than 100,000 press releases in the U.S. distributed through PR Newswire's distribution network during this time. The data was collected using multiple sources including Google Analytics, Visibility Reports, and Cision's proprietary press release processing software.



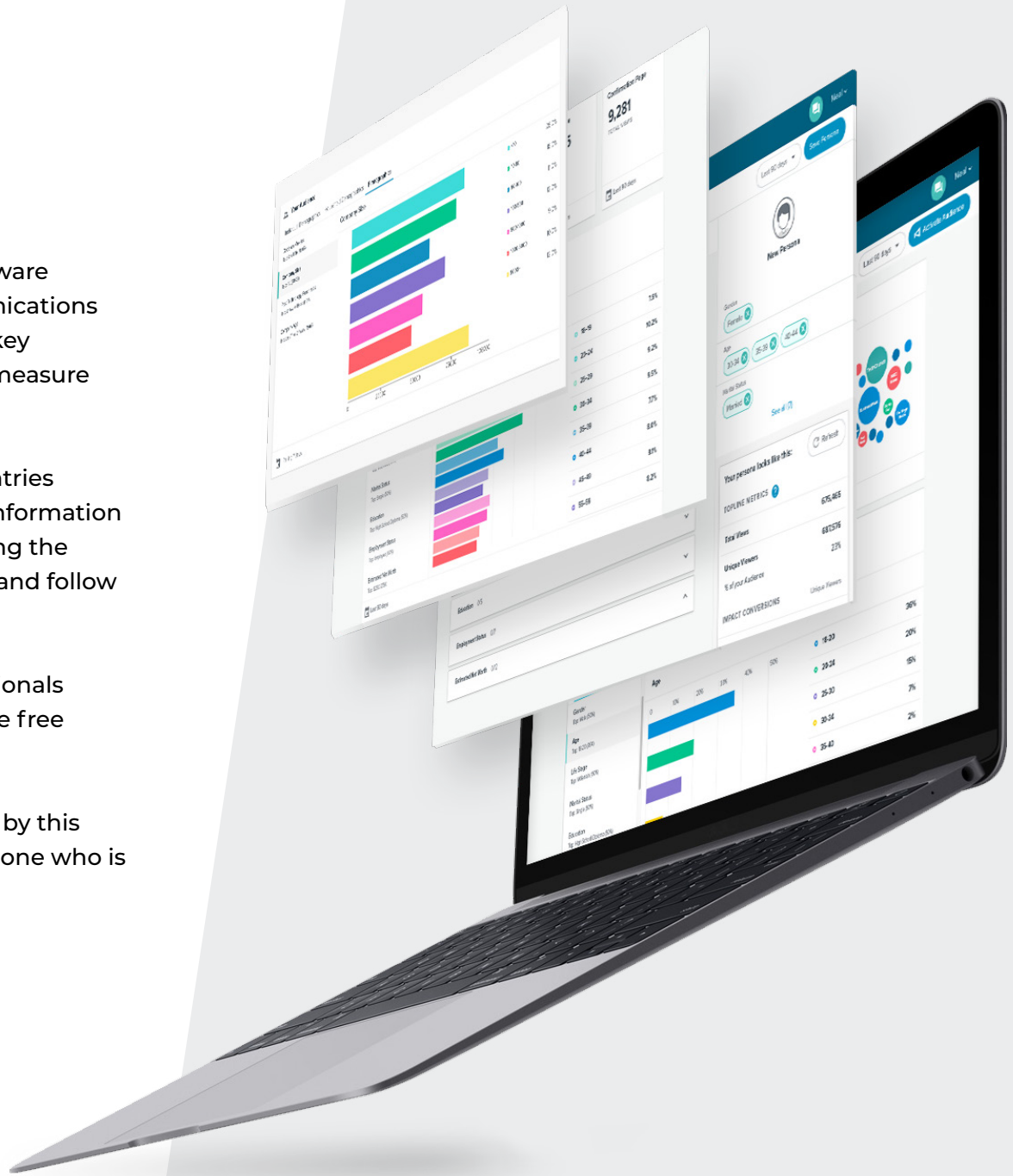
About Cision

Cision is a leading global provider of earned media software and services to public relations and marketing communications professionals. Cision's software allows users to identify key influencers, craft and distribute strategic content, and measure meaningful impact.

Cision has over 4,000 employees with offices in 24 countries throughout the Americas, EMEA, and APAC. For more information about its award-winning products and services, including the Cision Communications Cloud®, visit www.cision.co.uk and follow Cision on Twitter @CisionUK.

In an effort to support PR and communications professionals during these uncertain times, Cision has compiled these free COVID-19 PR resources to help guide you.

Cision's heart goes out to anyone who's been impacted by this global pandemic. For those who are sick, or know someone who is sick, we wish a speedy recovery.



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