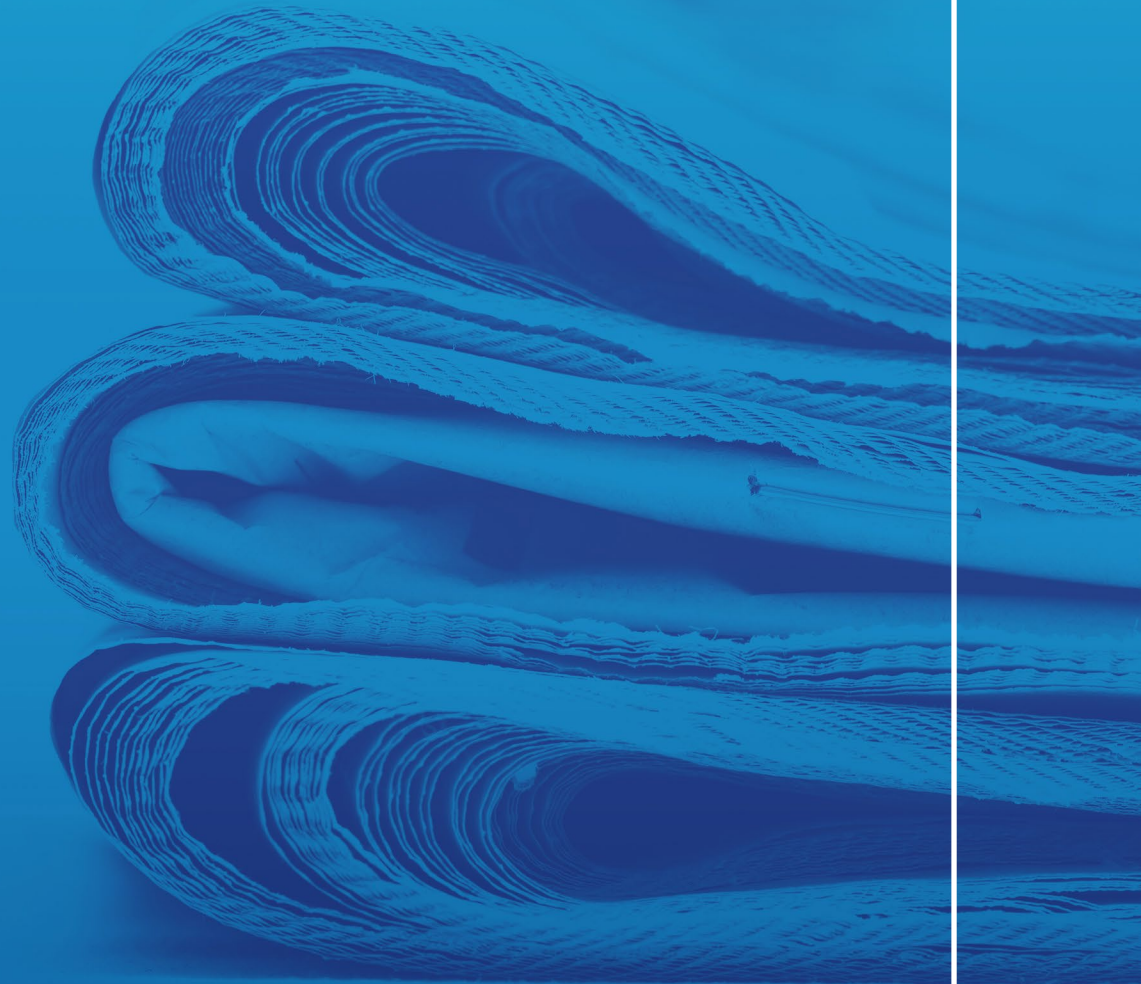


The Ultimate Guide to **MASTERING** the Modern MAT Release

Plus 8 how-to strategies for
creating meaningful content for
your audience and maximizing
distribution

Brandpoint®





The Mighty MAT

It's easier than ever for brands to reach their audience thanks to digital media. In 2012, there were about 500,000 blogs published daily. Today, we're publishing 3.5 million posts every single day.

With such a high saturation of content, PR and marketing pros face several challenges:

- The new pace of modern business means clients are **expecting print results at online speeds.**
- The tightening budgets and page counts of print publishers across the country have led to **less demand for sponsored content.**
- Overtaxed publishers and editors **struggle to find time for native-advertising pitches.**

However, earned media is now more valuable than ever to cut through the noise and build a solid reputation for your brand. Though the rise of the digital media industry has given PR and marketing pros new solutions, some of the classics never die, including the MAT release.

One of marketing's most powerful and enduring PR tools has had many names (and spellings) during its lifetime:

No matter what you call it, the MAT release continues to be a powerful tool for brands to grow their brand awareness, connect with targeted audiences and build credibility, among other benefits.

MAT release, matte release, feature article, advertorial, sponsored feature content, branded journalism, syndicated content.

This eBook goes deeper into the MAT release's history and why it continues to work. We'll also cover the different types of MAT releases (online, video, infographics, etc.), and eight proven strategies for creating a successful MAT release campaign.



Throughout this eBook, you'll also find statistics and quotes from editors who participated in our 2017 survey.

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What Is a MAT Release?

A MAT release is a feature article geared to a consumer audience and is often featured in newspaper sections such as home and garden, automotive, food/cooking, health and wellness, and other consumer-oriented areas. They help brands raise public awareness of a product, service or issue.

Before the days of the internet, MAT releases appeared in newspapers and publications to complement staff-written material. Now, in addition to print, they've become a powerful digital marketing tool.

MAT releases are versatile — from frying pans to incontinence products, fashion trends to home improvement, any product or service brand can benefit from a MAT release.

The old MAT release used to arrive in a big envelope on editors' desks. The new MAT release arrives in their inbox, and it can even autoloading right onto their website.

Unlike traditional ads, a MAT release article has the potential to be placed on the front page of a newspaper, front-and-center on the features page, or on the home page of a major news website. They provide relief from consumer ad fatigue because of their entertaining and informative nature.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A MAT RELEASE AND A PRESS RELEASE

A press release is a pitch to publications to influence editors or journalists to give their brand coverage without compensation. Though this method is free, there is no guarantee that a brand will get coverage. PR pros also have little control over what is said about the brand because the article is typically written by a journalist from that publication.

MAT releases, on the other hand, are a paid tactic in which placements are guaranteed and the articles can be contributed from the brand and created by a distribution partner, such as Brandpoint. In addition, there is an opportunity for a brand to receive earned coverage — editors who need to fill an empty space in their paper visit brandpointcontent.com to look for timely and relevant articles to place. The ease of this process makes the MAT release an ideal way to reach a broader audience through a range of media outlets.

A 2018 report found that 53 percent of U.S. based journalists [do not rely on press releases at all](#), and just 3 percent of journalists worldwide rely on press releases from a newswire. Considering the decline in value of the press release, the MAT release is a trusted solution to reach consumers of news media.

SECTIONS SEARCH The San Diego Union-Tribune

ADVERTISEMENT

Bee responsible! How to attract pollinators to your garden and help them thrive



It's been in the news for years now: the decline of pollinators such as honeybees and butterflies, and how it's upsetting our world's healthy ecosystem. We need pollinators for the growth of many of the foods we eat each day – according to the Natural Resources Conservation Service, some scientists estimate that one in three bites of food we take result from the work of pollinators. Berries, apples, oranges, almonds and scores of other foods, not to mention flowers, rely on pollinators. If they disappear, those foods will fade along with them.

So, why are pollinators declining? They can't find enough food because their habitats are disappearing.

Fortunately, we can all help protect pollinators. Ortho, a leading brand in lawn and garden, recently teamed up with the Pollinator Stewardship Council for a consumer education campaign, "Bee Responsible," aimed at helping home gardeners protect the pollinators in their yards, attract more of them and help them thrive.

In 2016, after evaluating the risk to honeybees and other pollinators, Ortho also announced plans to phase out neonicotinoid-based pesticides from all its outdoor gardening products and is investing in alternative pest control solutions. Ortho's parent company, Scotts Miracle-Gro, has funded 125 pollinator-friendly gardens throughout the country.

Want to attract pollinators to your yard and help them thrive? Here are some tips.

Make your garden pollinator friendly. Nectar and pollen-packed plants attract honeybees, butterflies, hummingbirds and other pollinators. Choose colorful flowers, such as alyssum, aster, delphinium, flax, lavender, liatris, lupine, phlox or zinnia. Check with your local garden store for native plants and flowers that thrive in your climate and choose a range of plants that bloom in different seasons.

What a MAT release is NOT

These are a few characteristics that will likely cause a MAT release to perform poorly:

- **Overt, heavy-handed commercialism.** Too many product mentions or promotional verbiage smacks of advertising to readers, who will see right through it.
- **Poor writing quality.** No reader wants to wade through boring, grammatically incorrect copy if they don't have to — and that includes editors. Add flair, excitement and human interest to your concept and your copy. Editors will be more likely to pick it up for added earned media coverage, and readers will develop a favorable view of your brand.
- **Lack of useful information.** Readers want actionable, empowering information — not a rehash of your key brand messaging points.
- **Unclear target audience.** You can't be all things to all people, but you can be exciting and useful to the group(s) most likely to buy your product or service.

A MAT release should never be:

- A sales driver (although building your brand usually leads to increased sales)
- A hard news story (those belong on wire services)
- A straightforward ad

The Modern MAT Release: Powerful Formats

Though its origins are in the print industry, the MAT release has transformed perfectly to fill a specific need in the digital world: a reliable supply of quality, free, consumer-friendly content. The MAT release pairs well with photos, infographics and video to offer consumers a more engaging experience for news editors.

What sets the MAT release apart from other sponsored content types is its association with credible and well-known news publications. Readers of regional newspapers have an established relationship with publications, so they are more likely to trust its content — whether online or in print.

In the following pages, we'll look at seven different formats of the MAT release and how they'll help connect your brand to a consumer audience.

PRINT DISTRIBUTION: The original MAT

Print is the tried-and-true format of the MAT release. With so much emphasis on digital marketing nowadays, the value of distributing a print MAT release is often overlooked. However, it still drives meaningful results and will give your brand benefits not provided by online MATs. Here are a few of those benefits:

Trust. The topic of “fake news” continues to make headlines as online publishers work to combat the sharing of misinformation, but print is the **most trusted of any medium** — 82 percent of internet users trust print ads when making a purchase decision. Readers of

The MAT release has various targeting capabilities that allow brands to reach a specific audience. Brandpoint offers geographic, device-based, interest-based and Spanish language targeting options.

print are also more likely to have an established relationship with a publication and are likely to trust its content and ads.

Attention. The average reader of a branded magazine will spend up to **20 to 25 minutes** with it, compared to a few minutes online. Their undivided attention is not interrupted with ads and temptations to click on other content.

Targeting. Print allows you to target your key audience with a precision that online just can't achieve. Want to target political junkies? Secure a placement in *The Wall Street Journal* or *New York Times*. Trying to catch the attention of Californians who might be interested in your new eco-friendly cleaning product? Smaller dailies and weeklies in that region will ensure your message lands on the breakfast tables of exactly the right demographic.

Unlike a digital MAT release, which often feeds right into a publisher site, print pickup relies on an editor finding your story, liking it and deciding to run it. Quality writing and relevant content of consumer value are the essential factors to achieve print coverage.

Saturation. Print offers a saturation level that online can't. In major metropolitan areas that have large dailies, those papers consistently reach 50 to 75 percent of the region's population. Plus, the numbers for big dailies are still impressive: *The Wall Street Journal's* print edition reaches more than 2 million readers, *USA Today* reaches nearly 1.8 million and the *New York Times* 1.6 million.

Transform your home in a weekend with these DIY projects

BRANDPOINT

Summertime isn't just for vacations or weekends at the cabin. Summer weekends — with longer days — are ideal opportunities for quick and inexpensive DIY projects that make a big statement around the home.

The average American homeowner spent nearly \$3,000 on home improvements in 2015, according to a Statista report. The following list of affordable projects can be achieved for a fraction of that cost.

Create wood accents

Use flooring to make headboards and accent walls. Retailers like *Lumber Liquidators* offer a variety of styles of flooring such as laminates, engineered, vinyl, click ceramic plank and more, and these flooring materials can easily be incorporated into many accent features. The flooring material can be affixed to walls and other surfaces with a special acrylic flooring tape. Flooring comes in a variety of styles, which can also be cut into striking patterns like chevron or herringbone.

Install butcher block countertops

Butcher block is a warm and rustic countertop style that's

affordable and increasingly popular. Made from strips of wood bonded together, it can be sliced and chopped on directly — a great option for the minimalist homeowner. Installation is DIY — friendly, making butcher block an ideal weekend project with a good step-by-step tutorial in hand.

Build a trellis

Building a garden trellis is a great way to draw more attention to what your green thumb has created. Dedicate Friday to sizing the trellis and cutting and framing the pieces, Saturday to building the panels and assembling and Sunday for digging the holes and setting the trellis into place. Tailor to what's best for your backyard by building out of wood, bamboo or PVC pipe.

Repurposed planters

When gardening outside isn't an option, bring the garden inside by making unique planter boxes. A DIY planter box is typically more affordable than store-bought, and the design possibilities are endless. Reuse vessels like shipping crates, Mason jars and tin boxes. Personalize them with colors and patterns to match your interior and inject personality and life into your space.

Add crown molding

Crown molding adds distinguished curves and angles to a ceiling, instantly elevating a room to a polished and sophisticated look. DIY crown molding does require attention to detail when measuring and marking the wall and cutting pieces, so measure twice to cut once.

These are just a few of the weekend-ready projects homeowners can knock out this summer to bring new life to spaces indoors and out. A weekend DIY project is a minimal time investment that not only creates a sense of accomplishment, but adds value to your home.



Use flooring to make headboards and accent walls.

ONLINE DISTRIBUTION: Always connected

While even the largest newspapers count their readership in the thousands, online media often boasts hundreds of thousands — and even millions — of consumers. Because of its wide reach, an online MAT release ensures a higher number of placements than print distribution.

The MAT release is a solution to the problem that a brand often faces after publishing a blog post to its website: No one is reading it!

Though blogs are a [valuable content marketing tactic](#), it will take more than just writing a blog post if you want web traffic. You could work on your SEO strategy to get your posts to appear in search results. Or you can work on a promotion plan, which can take a lot of work — researching influencers, requesting backlinks, paying for social media promotion, developing partnerships, etc.

To be successful in today's saturated media landscape, most brands combine owned, earned and paid promotion strategies to connect with audiences. The MAT release is a paid strategy that can link to owned content with the ability to receive earned coverage. It's the trifecta of promotion.

Distributing online offers even more options to capture the attention of audiences, with visual and interactive elements and different MAT release formats.

Print is **not** a thing of the past, but it can't carry the weight anymore:

Powerful online distribution to top media sites is essential.

ADVERTISEMENT

Solving 5 pain points in the homebuying process

When it comes to buying a home, the beauty of the process is truly in the eye of the beholder. Some people see the opportunity to start a new life, live their dreams and make memories that will, quite literally, last a lifetime. Others get caught up in the problems associated with the home purchasing process, including its myriad pain points, some of which are listed below.

Whichever path you follow, buying a home should be one of the most exciting moments in your life, so follow along to see which pain points in the process you might encounter, and what you can do about them.

1. Packing and moving



According to research from [loanDepot](#), almost 66 percent of respondents listed packing and moving as one of their biggest moving stressors. To combat this problem, start packing early and you'll avoid the mad dash at the end. You should also seek friends to help you move your items with a promise of a party at the end. The money you spend for pizza will be well worth it.

2. Timing the move



Timing is crucial during a move, so it's no surprise that 63 percent of those surveyed listed it as one of their greatest stressors. To take the stress out of your situation, it helps to plan for a delay. Rent a storage locker or set up a relative who can host you in a pinch just in case things don't align as you plan. Plan for the worst and chances are you won't need your backup plan.



LISTICLES: Easy-to-read lists + articles

Listicles are one of the most popular formats that resonate with audiences. As a numbered list, they are easy to skim and quickly digest, and they work for all types of topics and industries. They can be visual too — in the most successful listicles, each numbered item is paired with a photo to further improve readability. Listicles also offer information that's worth bookmarking, such as a how-to guide or best-of list.



INFOGRAPHICS: Visual storytelling

When an infographic is included in a MAT release, it's not only attention-grabbing, but there's a greater chance that readers will share it. Infographics are shared on social media **three times more than any other type of content**.

Infographics are also one of the **top five most used types of content**, according to Content Marketing Institute's 2018 B2B research report. They marry fascinating data and statistics with eye-pleasing design that makes it easy for readers to quickly digest a message.

So what can an infographic do that you can't achieve in a MAT release alone?

Makes it interesting to look at. No matter how engaging your copy is, it might not be enough to intrigue readers to read your MAT release. An infographic puts more emphasis on design than on the copy by using illustrations, charts and icons.

Makes numbers and complex information less intimidating.

Numbers and complex data can be difficult to comprehend, especially if presented in a long block of copy. An infographic organizes and displays information in a way that helps readers quickly understand the most important data points. According to [Kissmetrics](#), "even the most seemingly mundane statistics can be brought to life when conveyed as a stunning visual."

CHOOSING THE RIGHT FOOD FOR YOUR PET

PET PARENTS CHOOSE GOOD NUTRITION OVER LOWER PRICE

A recent survey from petMD found that most importantly, pet parents want what is right for the health of their pets when asked about the primary factor in their pet food purchase habits, and **ONLY FOUR PERCENT SAID THAT LOW PRICE WAS THE DETERMINING FACTOR.**



While nearly ten percent of respondents said that they focus on how their pet may like the taste of the food, **NEARLY FOUR OUT OF FIVE PEOPLE (79%)** said that they choose a food based on how nutritious or healthy they think it is.



WHY ARE LABELS SO CONFUSING?

In addition, pet parents were divided on how simple it is to properly read a pet food label. **51 PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS AGREED IT IS VIRTUALLY IMPOSSIBLE TO DETERMINE THE QUALITY OF PET FOOD INGREDIENTS** simply by reading the information on the package or ingredient label.



IN ADDITION, THE INCLUSION OF THESE THREE THINGS ON A PACKAGE IS HELPFUL TO NOTE WHEN TRYING TO DETERMINE THE QUALITY OF A PET FOOD PRODUCT.



FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT HILLSPET.COM/CHOOSE



After watching a video, **64 percent** of users are more likely to buy a product online.¹



80 percent of users recall a video ad they viewed in the past 30 days.²



Viewers retain **95 percent** of a message when they watch it in a video compared to 10 percent when reading it in text.³



VIDEO: Increasing content engagement

If infographics blend the strength of words with the clarity of images, video is the power of pictures in its purest form. Complement your MAT release with video and your story becomes richer, more enticing and more accessible.

With 500 million internet users watching video online every day (and that's just on Facebook), a MAT release video can achieve results substantially more impressive than copy alone.

¹ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/miketempleman/2017/09/06/17-stats-about-video-marketing/3/#6ded4e1c63b2>

² <https://www.forbes.com/sites/miketempleman/2017/09/06/17-stats-about-video-marketing/3/#6ded4e1c63b2>

³ <https://www.impactbnd.com/blog/video-content-the-importance-of-video-marketing>

When putting together a video to go with your MAT release, keep these points in mind:

- The video should be relevant to the content of your MAT release. If your release is about trends in home improvement, a video that promotes a specific real estate agency won't mesh with the messaging in the copy.
- The video should be informational, not promotional. Stick with giving viewers information they can use, rather than filling your video with product selling points or celebrity endorsements.
- Make it exciting. No one wants to watch a guy sitting in a chair talking about a product. Tell a story with your video. Create an introduction, rising action, climax and conclusion with scenes that pull viewers in. Make them want to watch until the final second.

Chron Local US & World Sports Business Entertainment Life

Star chef shares his secret to a juicy rib-eye: Cooking with air [Video]

Published 2:37 pm, Wednesday, December 7, 2016

✉ f t p d g



(BPT) - Chef Gordon Ramsay introduces a new take on classic rib-eye, just in time for the holiday season. His coffee and chili rubbed rib-eye is made with the Philips Airfryer, Chef Ramsay's favorite time-saving tool that helps you cook in a healthier way by using a tablespoon or less of oil and draining excess fat while cooking. Its unique starfish design in the bottom circulates hot air 360 degrees around the food, letting you do more than just fry – try using it to roast veggies, grill shrimp, even bake a cake! Chef Ramsay's rib-eye is paired with savory fingerling potatoes and compound herb butter. For this recipe and more holiday entertaining ideas, visit [Philips.com/Airfryer](https://philips.com/Airfryer).

This sponsored article is presented by Brandpoint.

- Brevity is beautiful in the digital world. Make your video only as long as it must be to tell your story in full. Many expert sources say two-minute videos see the best results. [This video by Paper & Packaging](#) is only one minute, but tells a heart-warming story featuring its products and services in a subtle, but meaningful way. (Grab a tissue!)

SPANISH LANGUAGE: A booming demographic

Currently, 58 million people of Hispanic origin live in the United States — not counting Puerto Rico — according to the U.S. Census Bureau. That number will soar to nearly 119 million by 2060, and when that happens, Hispanics will account for almost 29 percent of the U.S. population, the Bureau projects.

With numbers like that, companies shouldn't overlook the potential in this growing demographic. In early 2018, the Spanish language TV network Univision ranked as the fifth largest broadcast network in primetime with 1.6 million total viewers. But like any other media, Hispanic language outlets need a steady, reliable supply of quality content that is appealing, relevant and relatable to their audience.

A translation of your MAT release for this powerful and lucrative demographic will give your brand a larger reach and stronger connection among this community of Spanish speakers.

Half of all U.S. Hispanics say they prefer to speak and read in Spanish. Over 90 percent say it is important that future generations be able to do so as well. It's essential to reach this market and let them know they are important to your brand.

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Prepare sus comidas de verano con rapidez en el asador

Brandpoint (BPT) Jun 26, 2018 Updated 5 hrs ago 0



BUY NOW

(BPT) - Llegó el verano, y las temperaturas siguen en ascenso. Independientemente de que esté relajándose junto a la piscina, aplaudiendo a su equipo deportivo favorito, o paseando con familiares y amigos, protegerse del calor es prioridad. No necesita nada elegante. Con solo un sombrero o una gorra para alejar la luz solar de los ojos, una sombrilla para tener algo de sombra, y un racimo de uvas de California frías recién sacadas del refrigerador o la nevera portátil, es bien fácil escapar del acaloramiento de los días veraniegos.

Cuando llega el momento de recibir invitados, el asador puede ser el mejor amigo del anfitrión, pues facilita cocinar con rapidez y relajarse al aire libre al mismo tiempo. Un bistec de falda de costilla con ensalada de maíz del Suroeste con uvas, le garantizará complacer los sentidos con magníficos sabores, así como una hermosa combinación de colores con uvas rojas y verdes, aguacate y maíz, y una amplia gama de texturas agradables.

Pero ¿por qué servir ensaladas acompañantes comunes y corrientes, cuando platos extraordinarios como una ensalada con un pan a la parrilla, inspirada en la cocina italiana, ofrecen una opción fresca? La Ensalada de panzanela con uvas y radicchio junto con un trozo de pan italiano a la parrilla y cebollas, con una refrescante combinación de radicchio (achicoria italiana), pepinos y uvas. Esta ensalada, mezclada en un aderezo condimentado y decorada con queso de cabra desmenuzado, le da un toque de maravilla a cualquier menú de verano.

Y hablando de aderezar, recuerde que cualquier color de uvas de California — rojas, verdes o negras— conforman el centro de mesa comestible perfecto. Y para un postre frío, congele uvas para lograr la forma perfecta de culminar un caluroso día de verano.

Para ver más recetas visite el sitio web GrapesfromCalifornia.com.

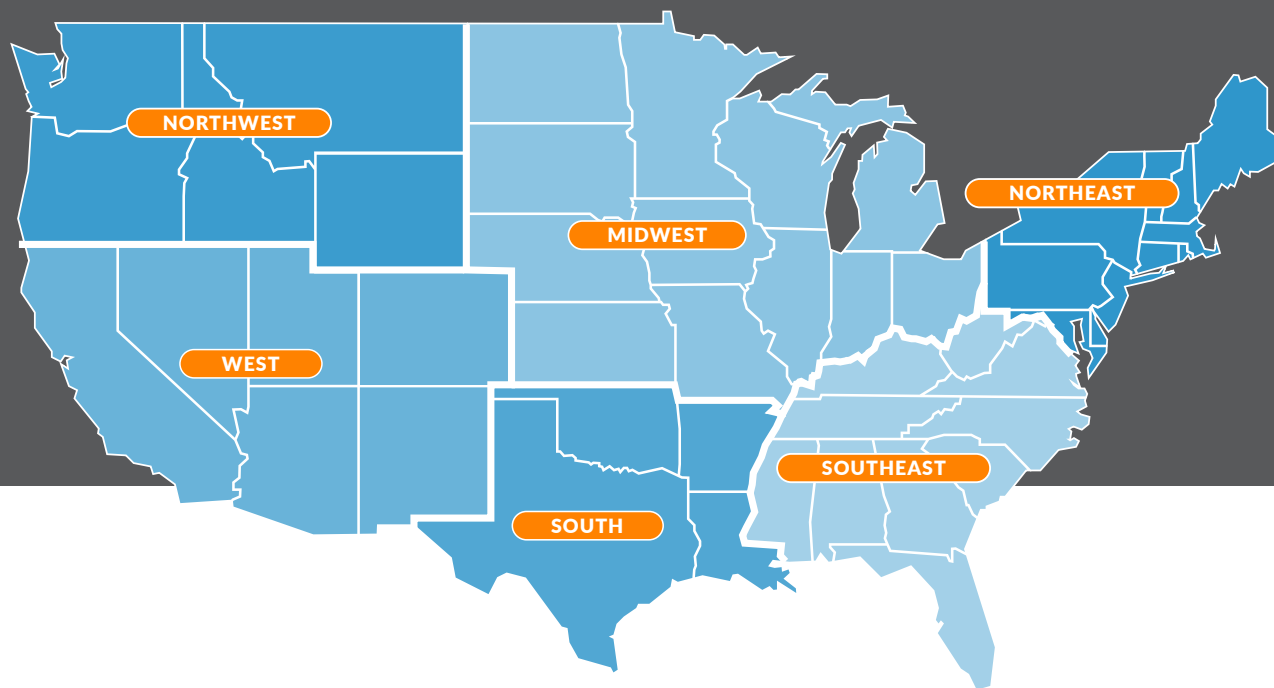
Bistec de falda de costilla a la parrilla con ensalada de maíz del Suroeste y uvas

Tiempo de preparación/adobo: 25 minutos. Tiempo de cocción: 15 minutos

Sirve: 4 porciones

Ingredientes

- 1 1/4 libras de bistec de falda sin grasa
- 1/2 cucharadita de sal kosher (en dos porciones separadas)
- 1/2 cucharadita de comino molido
- 1/2 cucharadita de cilantro molido
- Pimienta recién molida al gusto



REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION: Mapping the MAT

The traditional power of the MAT release resides in mass distribution to a broad-based consumer audience. Some products and services (shampoo, automobile tires, home light fixtures, etc.) apply to most people no matter where they live. In this case, brands must gain coverage anywhere they can.

But nationwide distribution doesn't reflect the needs of every marketer in business today. Many brands' products and services cater to audiences that live within a specific region within the U.S., or a particular state, city or DMA.

These marketers need to "map their MAT" and target regions or states, and provide audience results within that geographic area. Examples of products that would benefit from this

approach include snowblowers, surf boards, winter boots, certain kinds of foods, and regulated insurance or financial products.

When evaluating marketing tactics that aim to raise brand awareness by region, pay attention to two key capabilities:

- Make sure the provider can assist you with writing services that cater to local readers. You need to understand, and write for, that regional audience.
- Find out what type of metrics are available to measure your success. Can you measure audience and engagement specifically within your target region?



Making the MAT Release Work for You

Now that you know why MAT releases work and what a modern MAT looks like, it's time to take the next step. Here are eight proven strategies to craft great content and achieve maximum distribution.

1 Target your message

Creating and distributing a MAT release without targeting it toward a specific audience means few people will find it useful. You're likely to miss out on a large group of people who will get introduced to your brand for the first time.

It's vital to know who your message needs to reach (usually the group most likely to buy what you're selling), and tailor that message to that group.

First, do your market research. Who is buying your product or service now? Who isn't buying but could be? Once you've identified your target audience, look at the media they regularly consume. Are they Facebook fanatics? Do they tweet nonstop? Or are they more likely to spend hours on financial news or home improvement websites? Knowing what media they prefer will also give insight into the style and tone to use in your MAT release.

BONUS: Create a buyer persona, and then develop your MAT release for that person.

Learn more about creating buyer personas.

2 Ask "What's in it for me?"

Here is the No. 1 secret to MAT release success: It needs to have value for your target audience.

That may seem like a no-brainer, but when you're trying to juggle a lengthy list of messaging points and clients (either internal or external) who have their own ideas of what needs to get said, it's easy to lose sight of what your audience wants to read.

There's a time and a place for using "I" and "we." On your homepage, for instance, using "we" can humanize your brand. But in the case of a sponsored content article, users want to read something relevant and useful to them, such as:

- The latest local news and events
- Interesting and surprising life stories
- Tips that can be easily used in day-to-day life

Readers browse with the perspective of “What’s in it for me?” (Content writers often refer to this as “WIIFM.”) This is when you step outside of your marketing role and think from a reader’s perspective to evaluate how useful and interesting your MAT release will be to the reader.

Make their interests your priority and fill your MAT with relatable information that enhances their lives in some way. Whether it’s learning how to get the best results when redecorating, or broadening their understanding of a specific health issue, **readers want to read content about them, not you.**

Resist the temptation to incorporate overtly promotional messaging points in your article. The content and tone of the piece should reflect your brand’s voice and values, so an overt marketing message is not needed. In the most successful cases, a MAT only contains one or two brand mentions, which often appear in a CTA at the bottom of the article.



Why Editors Reject Sponsored Content

- Not relatable or useful to readers: **23%**
- Wrong length for space constraints: **17%**
- More than 1-2 brand mentions: **15%**
- Wrong tone for publication: **15%**
- Brand mention competes with paper's advertisers: **13%**
- Not local content: **12%**
- Poorly written: **5%**

Source: Brandpoint's 2017 Editor Survey

3 Think like an editor

Essentially, you are going to help editors do their job by providing a MAT release that not only speaks to your audience, but to their readers as well. In our survey, we found that the main reason newspaper editors reject a piece of sponsored content is it was not relatable or useful to the reader.

The primary reason we see sponsored content fail to meet this standard is because the article is too focused on the brand presented. “Too many articles push a particular product or manufacturer,” said a special sections editor at GateHouse Media. “I’m looking for useful articles that present information from an ‘expert’ in the field.”

Editors will also reject content if it’s the wrong length given space constraints. While the amount of space always varies, when editors were asked how many words they prefer sponsored content to be, the majority (38 percent) selected

"it depends on space constraints." However, the next most popular answer was 400-600 words (31 percent). So, the best thing you can do is make sure your content is concise. Use proper grammar and writing guidelines (see "Follow best MAT release writing practices") and avoid passive voice. Editors and readers also prefer articles with bullets, numbers and subheads to break up the copy.

4 Find a relevant and timely message

You know what you want to publicize and who you want to speak to. You even know where you want your message to appear. But do you know what to say? Captivating copy will encourage people to read and think favorably of your brand.

Here are three ways to choose an interesting MAT release topic that will grab the attention of readers and editors.

Think of a theme

What category does your product or service fit into? If you are promoting a new type of paint or an innovative flooring material, your product falls into the home improvement or home decorating categories. Identifying the proper category or special section of a newspaper allows you to zero in on an overall theme for your MAT.

Sixty-five percent of editors looking for sponsored content want to fill special sections. A clear theme in your MAT will help editors easily identify if it's a good fit for a special section.

Instead of... →	Write About...
Discussing your flooring client, their products and what they offer... →	Tips for updating a kitchen, and include a mention of one of your client's most durable flooring products.
Focusing on your gym-management client... →	Goals to increase your fitness and include your client as a gym that will help the reader maintain healthy habits.
Listing the benefits of your food client's healthy ingredients... →	A recipe piece emphasizing nutritional eating with one of your client's products listed as a healthy example.
Writing an article about a specific travel destination... →	Affordable travel tips, with your client as one of the listed options.

What questions does your audience have?

If you were thinking of buying this paint, what questions would you have about the overall process, not just the product? For example, people shopping for paint might want to know what differentiates paint types, how different finishes look on the wall or what “low VOC” means. Speaking to those topics will give readers useful information and allow you to work in your messaging in a way that seems organic and not intrusive.

Cover what’s trending

Newspapers plan their special sections to feature some topics during specific weeks or months of the year. If you miss the window when your content is most relevant, getting coverage becomes a whole lot harder.

To hit the mark, research what other newspapers are currently publishing. What’s trendy right now? Is DIY hot? Are readers debating whether the trendiest tone of puce is right for their dining room? Tell readers something about the trend that will allow them to apply it to their own lives. By covering trends that your audience is interested in, you prove that your brand is knowledgeable about timely topics in your industry.

BONUS: Visit Brandpoint’s Featured Category Calendar to see how we schedule our categories to meet editors’ timetables.

5 Choose a relatable lifestyle image

Accompanying your MAT with a good lifestyle image can boost print placements and online readership. But a bad photo — one that is poor quality, dull, off-topic or overtly promotional — won’t get you desirable results. When choosing an image to pair with your MAT, keep these points in mind:

- **Photos that feature people are far more engaging than those that don’t.** Readers can connect better to content if they see themselves in the image. Your photo should include people or situations that match your target audience.
- **The image should complement the message of the article.** If your feature article targets first-time homeowners undertaking a renovation project, an image of a couple in their mid to late 20s installing flooring is more likely to resonate than a product shot of a box of floor tiles.
- **Action shots are more attention-grabbing than static photos.** One special sections editor at Southern Lakes Newspaper said, “I prefer photos with people using the products as opposed to still shots of items. Action photos draw more attention from the reader.”
- **Quality counts.** If your image is grainy, blurry, oddly framed or discolored, readers will have a hard time deciphering the photo. It also puts your brand at risk of looking unprofessional.

6 Follow best MAT release writing practices

Writing quality is a key element to a MAT release's success. Poorly written MAT releases garner substantially fewer placements than ones with sparkling prose.

Keep these writing points in mind while crafting your article:

1. **Follow Associated Press style.** The AP Stylebook has long been the standard for print media, and many online publishers follow it as well.
2. **Write like a journalist.** If you're having trouble formatting your article, consider using a classic journalism tool: the inverted pyramid. State the most important info first, followed by the supporting details, and end with the least crucial points.
3. **Cite your sources.** MAT releases are placed in newspapers and should therefore read like news. Include supporting statistics and quotes to add credibility to your piece and to give it an objective, authoritative tone.
4. **"But I'm not a writer!"** Say you work for a pharmaceutical or healthcare company; a doctor may be a great [expert resource to add credibility](#) to your article, but if they're not comfortable writing, have someone at your company ghostwrite or outsource the work.
5. **Keep things active.** Passive voice is boring. Active voice engages readers. Here's an example: "The dog was eaten by the lion." This waters down what should be an eye-popping statement. This is better: "The lion ate the dog." Or better yet, "The lion devoured the dog."
6. **Have a conversation.** The best writing is a conversation between the writer and the reader. Avoid an academic tone or talking down to your readers. Your copy should speak to readers as if you were a well-educated friend enlightening them on an interesting subject.
7. **Grammar counts.** Poor grammar and punctuation makes your MAT look less intelligent — and by default, your product or service is associated with lower quality.
8. **Create a great headline:** While studies show that many people don't read past the headline, that shouldn't mean you cram everything you want to say in the headline. Instead, hook readers with a concise and catchy headline. Here are a few tips:
 - Use a number in the headline so readers knows it's a list. But don't use too high of a number, which could deter readers.
 - Try to avoid the overused "how to" in a headline. For example, instead of "How to add texture to your family room," try, "The hottest trends for adding texture to your family room."

- Ask questions. If you're trying to target an audience with a specific problem, a question is a great way to address their issues. The question should present the problem, and then follow it with a preview of the solution. For example: "Hosting for the holidays? These 8 tips will keep you sane."
- Create a sense of urgency. Instead of "Best fruit salads for summer" make readers feel like they have a limited time to buy: "The fruit salads you need to make before summer ends."
- Make sure there's something in it for the reader — saving money, saving time, learning something new or having fun.
- Write multiple headlines and A/B test. Some headlines will work better than others, and some will attract a different audience segment. A/B testing allows you to find what works best for your brand's content.

7 Determine quality

Online

How meaningful are your placements? Quantity counts, but so does quality. A hundred online placements are worthless if those websites don't reach your target audience. Conversely, a single great placement can yield millions of valuable impressions.

Questions to ask to ensure online placements deliver optimum value:

- Does your MAT release appear on the websites of top online media, such as the digital editions of top 25 newspapers? Or is it sitting stagnant and unread on a free press release posting site?
- Can people find your article? Does it appear on a home page or category page? Or does it languish where no human could ever find it?
- Are you spending hours tracking down possible venues for your MAT? Or are you letting someone else (a distribution and creation service such as Brandpoint) do the legwork that can ensure quality placements?

When reviewing placement results for your MAT release, put the most stock in "actual" reported numbers for your audience — not estimates or amplifications. Third-party reporting and verification also adds credibility to what was achieved.

Print

Historically, print has always been a tougher nut to crack for marketers. Not only do marketers rarely have the resources to build relationships and convince print editors to write about their product or service, the print media rarely has the time or staff to listen to a marketing pitch. The MAT release is the perfect solution for marketers and print media alike.

So what's the secret to getting print media to pick up your MAT? Assuming you've addressed the issue of quality (by writing your release in AP style, reining in commercialism and creating a compelling, informative story), you still have to get your release into the right hands.

You can either invest the time in identifying the right person to receive your release at each publication you want to target, or you can distribute to print media through a trusted MAT release distributor.

Print editors who subscribe to MAT release services are essentially pre-qualified; they're already looking for quality content. You just need to create a good story, and then the quality MAT release company can take care of the rest.

Place value on daily newspapers that people are most likely to read and subscribe to. Weekly shoppers do not fall into this category.

8

Measure success

Once your MAT release is out in the world and placements start rolling in, how do you evaluate your results? If you've distributed with a MAT release service, they'll gather and present the results for you. But don't settle without question for the organization's interpretation.

Keep these considerations in mind when evaluating results:

- What is the reach, audience and credibility of the media that picked up your MAT?
- What is the ad equivalency of your placements? This measure still matters in today's world: It's one way to put a measurable value on the distribution of your MAT release.
- How is your MAT release distributor reporting your placements/impressions? Are the numbers real, or inflated by estimates and other mathematical equations that may not represent reality?
- Are the reported placement numbers actual or estimated?
- Have your results been verified by a credible third party?

Measurement is everything. How else can you determine ROI? Actual numbers provide 100 percent credibility. When evaluating providers, this should be one of the first questions that is asked: Are you reporting actual or enhanced numbers?

Is a MAT Release an Effective SEO Play?

It's a common misconception that an online MAT release could result in Search Engine Optimization (SEO) benefits. Though an online MAT release may contain some elements of a well-optimized page, it will not perform well in rankings as a piece of syndicated content.

Google assesses more than 200 factors to determine how to rank a piece of content in search results. Plus, Google's complex algorithm changes hundreds of times per year! So, SEO is a more valuable activity when done to your own web pages where your brand has [authority to optimize](#) and change all kinds of elements.

The ultimate goal for a MAT release is brand awareness, so don't expect it to drive meaningful traffic to your website. That said, you can still include 1-2 links in your MAT that lead to relevant landing pages on your brand's site so readers can learn more.

Third-party metrics are crucial from an accuracy and credibility standpoint.

Remember that a MAT release isn't advertising. It's brand awareness in its most subtle form: You're helping consumers overcome challenges, and suggesting your brand's potential role in solving those problems.

A MAT release that is placed in a big, leading newspaper also looks pretty darn impressive. In one instance, a Brandpoint client's MAT release helped them establish authority in their industry. That MAT was a big reason why a top retailer began selling their product.

BONUS: Links to your site are smart. But create specific landing pages relevant to the MAT's content. Don't just send people to your homepage and make them search for what they were expecting to see immediately.



Mastering the Modern MAT Release

Like most PR and marketing tools, the MAT release has evolved with the times. Today's ever-changing digital media landscape continues to shape the modern MAT release. It is no longer just words on a page. It's pictures, infographics, video and so much more.

Nevertheless, today's PR media placements retain time-tested factors. Chief among these factors is the idea of quality — in terms of the content you present to consumers, as well as the placements you achieve.

Put the concepts and strategies in this eBook to work on your marketing and PR goals. The modern MAT release is better and smarter than ever, and it's ready to help you get there.

More MAT Release Tips:

- What is a MAT Release?
- 10 Proven MAT Release Writing Tips
- How to Avoid the Hard-Sell in Your Sponsored Content
- Why First-Person Sponsored Content is a No-No
- Content Marketing for Pharma and Healthcare: The MAT Release
- 7 Tips to Reach Consumers in Print During the Holidays

The Ultimate Guide to Mastering the Modern MAT Release

About **Brandpoint**

Brandpoint is a full-service content marketing agency in Minneapolis. Since 1996, we've helped agencies and clients of all sizes tell their brands' stories and get them seen by the people that matter most.

As the industry leader in MAT release distribution, our online media placements reach the largest and highest quality audience in the industry. Plus, editors have trusted Brandpoint content for their print needs since our inception — and still do today.

Personalized customer service from our account managers and experienced on-staff writers and editors (you can work directly with them) makes doing business with Brandpoint enjoyable, efficient and effective. Once your content is live, comprehensive reporting accurately delivers every detail of your campaign results — and we never use inflated numbers.

Learn more about Brandpoint's content creation and MAT release services by contacting one of our content marketing consultants today.

| [Contact a Brandpoint Consultant](#)