

Hi Matt:

Original copy is in black, notes and explanation either in green or in the margin. By the way, using green for body notes and black for copy is a useful trick when you're writing drafts – it helps the client visualise what the copy you've written actually looks like, and saves them having to wade through acres of stuff if they want to give it a quick scan before reading the notes.

I've reset this and double-spaced, purely for readability and so there's enough room for notes in the margin.

Apologies if some of it seems nitpicky. It's a strong press release as it stands, but the idea here is to focus you on the way you think about language in this context. A good guideline to remember is that clarity and simplicity are essential, but they shouldn't be pursued at the expense of fluency.

At the bottom is a short list of things I'd like you to have a second go at when you have a moment.

### **Recognising the importance of energy efficiency**

Like I said on the phone, this is a good, solid headline. Although it doesn't ask a question (that's a legitimate but relatively uncommon headline technique) it does plant one in the reader's mind. You might consider a

stronger verb form: 'recognising' implies a degree of passivity. 'Tackling' maybe?

I didn't mention this on the phone, but it's often useful to mention or refer to the name or type of business in the headline, especially if it's doubling as the subject line of an email. In this case, 'corporate gift' is probably your key phrase ('Fastlane Branding' isn't really a does-what-it-says-on-the-tin name.) Some very quick ideas:

### **A corporate gift... to the planet**

### **A new way of tackling energy efficiency for UK corporate gift firm**

### **Fastlane Branding makes CarbonZero corporate gifts**

[ 'New' is always a fantastic word to include in PR headlines. You are, after all, trying to get in the 'news'. ]

Customers of the UK's top supplier of corporate gifts, badges and clothing, Fastlane Branding, have even more cause to enjoy their products. **That's** because they're proactively changing to reduce their impact on the environment. They've achieved CarbonZero status for the second year running and are the first franchise in the UK to become members of the CarbonZero Federation.

Fastlane HQ in Leamington Spa, Warwickshire, have been reducing their energy usage (and expenses). Employee Emily Jones said **"it's been achieved by doing simple things like switching computers off overnight and changing to low energy light bulbs. It's mostly**

Bill Hilton 26/1/09 9:34

**Comment:** As I said, a shorter first para would be useful here. Also, can you think of something punchier than '... cause to enjoy their products'? Again, try to think of something that's human-oriented, but which requires a stronger verb than 'enjoys'. As far as you can, focus on people **doing** things rather than having things done to them, receiving or experiencing them passively. The most basic ingredient of any story is somebody doing something. See 'to do' list at the bottom.

Bill Hilton 26/1/09 9:36

**Comment:** Just bear in mind the whole singular/plural thing for companies: it's not worth obsessing about, but you need to be aware of it. By the way, although most contractions are fine in a PR context, I always think that *they've* and *they're* are best avoided, as they are quite ugly and difficult to read.

Bill Hilton 26/1/09 9:36

**Comment:** You'd definitely want to change this – an HQ is a thing, not a group of things.

Bill Hilton 12/3/09 19:35

**Comment:** Make it personal: 'we've achieved it by...'. Make it more concrete and specific, too: what does Emily do? If she's young, mention her age. From a journalist's point of view, an articulate young woman who might possibly be photogenic is a big asset to any story. 'Production Manager Emily Jones 23, said 'we've been....'

**about common sense.”** All 23 UK based Fastlane Branding franchisees are also being encouraged to save energy and reduce waste.

Bill Hilton 26/1/09 9:42

**Comment:** One of those occasions when it's actually a good idea to listen to the MS Word grammar checker when it moans at you about using the passive voice. 'The company is encouraging its 43 UK franchisees to cut energy usage, too.'

Note my use of 'cut' there instead of 'save'. Always choose good, solid, Anglo-Saxon words when you get a chance.

Bill Hilton 26/1/09 9:51

**Comment:** 'Ambition' is usually a good word for PRs, but in this case I'd cut to 'they aim...'

Bill Hilton 26/1/09 9:56

**Comment:** The trend for brand names without office caps is a COMPLETE pain in the bum for PRs, copywriters and journalists. Lower-case initials look good in logos, but they affect readability (people read in the expectation that proper nouns will have initial caps) and you can't put them at the start of a sentence. I either ignore the howls of protest and cap them (CO2balance) or use some device to indicate that it is a proper noun. In this instance, for example, you could add .com to the end.

Bill Hilton 26/1/09 9:56

**Comment:** This could be tighter – see 'to do' list, below.

Bill Hilton 12/3/09 19:36

**Comment:** Feels like it needs the company name here. 'Fastlane's MD, Derek Jenkins, said...'

Their ambition is to become carbon neutral by combining methods recommended by co2balance who run the CarbonZero Federation. These are: increasing energy efficiency, switching to renewable energy sources, and offsetting unavoidable carbon dioxide emissions through projects run by co2balance. These projects cover the globe and include such things as providing solar powered lamps in place of kerosene to East Africa and building a hydro-dam to provide renewable energy in China.

Managing Director Derek Jenkins said **"We are proud to be members of the CarbonZero Federation and would encourage others to follow our lead. Fastlane Branding is a fast growing franchise. We need to be aware of the impact our growth has on the environment and take steps to make sure it is a positive one."**

Bill Hilton 12/3/09 19:36

**Comment:** MDs are expected to be boring, so they are allowed to use words like 'impact' and 'positive'. Avoid putting words like this into the mouths of cool kids such as Emily, though. A quote like this might make it into a trade mag, but a more general publication wouldn't include it.

To find out more information about Fastlane Branding go to [www.fastlanebranding.com](http://www.fastlanebranding.com). For further information on CarbonZero and reducing your carbon footprint go to [www.co2balance.com](http://www.co2balance.com) or [www.carbonzeroplanet.org](http://www.carbonzeroplanet.org).

Ends

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Notes to editors:

Media contact at AHBL PR: Clive Wedgery tel: 01284 274 283 or email [clive@ahblpr.com](mailto:clive@ahblpr.com).

### About Fastlane Branding

Fastlane Branding was established in the UK in 1979 and is now the European market leader in corporate recognition products. It is a franchise organisation with a network of 23 franchisees operating across the UK and five master franchisees across Europe. All franchisees are profitable and network turnover has grown year on year every year.

Bill Hilton 26/1/09 10:10  
**Comment:** This needs to be shorter – ideally about half the length. See 'to do'!

It is the UK's leading franchise specialising in badge manufacture, signs, business gifts, plaques, awards and promotional products, and this year celebrated 20 years of business excellence.

For further information go to: [www.fastlanebranding.com](http://www.fastlanebranding.com)

### **Alternative headings:**

Franchise goes green

Energy efficiency at work

CarbonZero is common sense

Changes to corporate environment

Bill Hilton 26/1/09 10:11

**Comment:** Good. Strictly speaking RE is a franchisor, but it's no big deal.

Bill Hilton 26/1/09 10:11

**Comment:** Big tick – plants a strong question.

Bill Hilton 26/1/09 10:12

**Comment:** Big fat no-no on this one; doesn't really say anything.

**Well done** on resisting the urge to make puns on the company being in the 'fast lane' to CarbonZero recognition. The idea will have been flogged to death in every other PR they have ever sent out.

### Things to do:

1. Rewrite those first two sentences as a standalone para. Try to make them more direct and concrete.
2. Sharpen up the 'cover the globe' sentence.
3. Try to get the 'about' section at the end down to just 2-4 sentences, max. 60 words.

Give me a shout when you're done and I'll take a look. By the way, here are those notes on parts of speech I promised you:

1= Concrete nouns (i.e., that describe a thing, person, action or event:

'the mountain', 'the table', 'Christina', 'the robbery'.)

1= Strong, active verbs ('ran', 'hit', 'attacked', 'wrote'. Every verb should tell a story.)

3. Little 'uns: pronouns, conjunctions, articles, prepositions.

4. Abstract nouns: 'thought', 'feeling' and all those. The big exception is 'free', which you should always use when it's justified.

5. Weaker verbs, especially those passive in meaning ('thought', 'gained', 'enabled'). Participles (those '-ing' words that aren't nouns) fall into this category, too.

6. Adjectives, which are OK, but don't use too many and keep them short. Your 'top supplier' is an example of good adjective choice. 'Negative' wasn't necessary, though.

7. Adverbs: your motto should be 'kill the adverbs, kill, kill, kill!' Some are OK, and adverbial phrases are usually fine ('9 out of 10 cats prefer food with added fish'.) However, try to avoid '-ly' adverbs as if your life depends upon it. 'Actively' was a particularly ripe example. If you feel an adverb is necessary to add meaning, check to make sure you can't beef up the verb. For example, 'she runs quickly' can be changed to 'she sprints' – the verb is stronger and more descriptive, and the word in the middle has been sent to adverb heaven.