

APOGEE

PEAK OF FLIGHT

NEWSLETTER

What makes and Interesting Launch Report?

By Tim Van Milligan

This is just my opinion, but I don't find too many articles about rocket launches too interesting. This is particularly relevant for articles in the national rocketry magazines. Why? Because they don't involve the reader (i.e., "me").

There is an old story about advertising that goes like: "I would bet you a million dollars that I could write a 10,000 word article (without any photos or illustrations), printed in tiny 6 point high type; and that you would read every single word." But this is only true if the story had the headline "This is the life story of _____" (fill in your name in the blanks).

The point is that the article has to be about the person reading the story. There is no difference in a launch report. They rarely have anything to do with the average Joe reading it. So they often skip over them. If their name was mentioned, they would probably read the whole thing.

The launch report in the local club newsletter has much higher chance of being read by the modeler. The reason is obvious; there is a higher probability that the name of the member will be mentioned in the article. If not his name, then maybe the name of his close friends.

If you are going to write a launch report article, the first thing you need to do is find out who in the audience is, and what it is that interests them about the launch. If it is a local newsletter, try to get as many names of club members mentioned as possible.

Also people love to see pictures -- of themselves -- so include a lot of them. The old saying is still true: "a picture is worth a thousand words."

To me, the boringest pictures are of a rocket taking off. Most of the time, only sky fills the background, so you can't get any appreciation of the size or scale of the rocket. The photographer probably takes a lot of pride in taking lift-off photos, because they are most difficult to capture. But they lack anything special to the person reading the article.

Personally, I like to see pictures of people actually working on their rockets. Not the canned "head-to-toe" image of the person in a posed position holding their rockets. But photos of prep work: helping a younger model in hooking up micro-clips, packing chutes or of the people squinting into the sun as they track their rockets. It is also important to get the person's name into the caption of the photo.

For national magazines, I think you need to mix in some photos of nationally recognized people. If you can't think of any, start with the vendors and the manufacturers. Do you know why people like seeing these photos? Because the readers might be customers of those people and want to know what they look like. It gives them confidence to see the faces of the people they are sending money to. They might want to look them in the eye, and gauge whether or not they are trustworthy.

People like to see photos of other notable people too: famous authors like Homer Hickam, or astronauts like Jay Apt. These are great photos, because they give the reader some pride or pleasure in the hobby of rocketry. They think: "If this famous person enjoys rocketry, then maybe there is something special about the hobby..."

Another type of famous person is the guy that has made some contribution to the hobby. People also like to see the face of the person that first flew the "gizmo" that revolutionized some aspect of the industry. But make sure you mention that accomplishment in the caption of the photo.

It is these similar types of things that add some spice to the text. Tell people who showed up, and why they are important to the hobby of rocketry. If they demonstrated the "gizmo," tell what happened. Was it successful?

What people really want, and the reason they save whole issues of the publication is for "technical" or "how-to" articles. If they can learn something, or some technique in the article, they'll love you for it. This might include some type of new product, or a new method for increasing launch reliability.

There might also be some type of lesson to learn in how



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the range was operated. Someone reading the article might be planning a launch of their own in the future, and they'd be interested in that type of information.

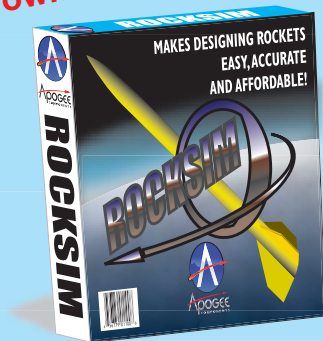
A light-hearted story might also make for some interesting reading. But there is a fine line between humor and making fun of a person. So just be careful.

Nearly this entire article was strictly my opinion. But these would be the tips I'd offer to you if you're writing a launch report article. Try to make sure that you relate it to your readers as much as possible.

About the Author:

Tim Van Milligan is the owner of Apogee Components (<http://www.apogeerockets.com>) and the curator of the rocketry education web site: <http://www.apogeerockets.com/education>. He is also the author of the books: "Model Rocket Design and Construction," "69 Simple Science Fair Projects with Model Rockets: Aeronautics" and publisher of the FREE e-zine newsletter about model rockets. You can subscribe to the e-zine at the Apogee Components web site, or sending an email to: ezine@apogeerockets.com with "SUBSCRIBE" as the subject line of the message.

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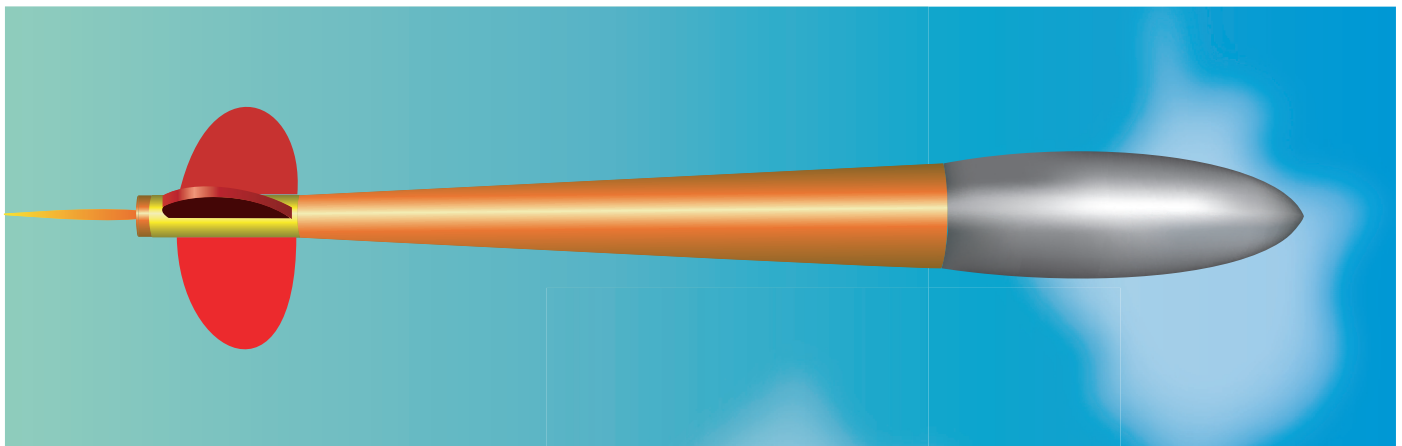
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