2012 COMMUNICATIONS AWARDS PROGRAM

INDIVIDUAL SUBMISSION ENTRY FORM

(Please copy and complete this form for each entry)

Check only ONE entry classification below:

1. AAPA Awareness Initiative Messaging _____
2. Advertisements – Single _____
3. Advertisements – Series _____
4. Annual Reports _____
5. Audio-Only Presentations _____
6. Directories/Handbooks _____
7. Miscellaneous _____

8. Overall Campaign _____
9. Periodicals _____
10. Promotional/Advocacy Material _____
11. Social/Web-Based Media _____
12. Special Events _____
13. Videos _____
14. Visual-Only Presentations _____
15. Websites __X__

☑ **CATEGORY 1**   ☐ **CATEGORY 2**

Entry Title: Redesigned NCPorts.com

Port Name: North Carolina State Ports Authority

Port Address: P.O. Box 9002, Wilmington, NC 28402 USA

Contact Name/Title: Shannon L. Moody, Director of Communications

Telephone: 910-343-6482   Email Address: Shannon.Moody@ncports.com

Please indicate precisely how your port's name should be listed on any award(s) it may win:

Name: North Carolina State Ports Authority

Being as precise as possible, please attach a separate entry statement, in English, that:

- **Defines the Communications Challenge or Opportunity**
  - Situation Analysis *(assess major internal and external factors)*
  - Problem Statement *(briefly describe in specific & measurable terms)*

- **Summarizes Planning and Programming**
  - Goals *(summarize desired outcome or end result)*
  - Target Publics *(be specific; list primary and secondary audiences if appropriate)*
  - Objectives *(identify specific and measurable milestones needed to reach goal)*

- **Identifies Actions Taken and Communication Outputs**
  - Strategies *(identify media choices, etc., that require tactics to complete)*
  - Tactics *(specify actions used to carry out strategies)*
  - Implementation Plan *(include timelines, staffing and budget)*

- **Summarizes Evaluation Methods and Communications Outcomes**
  - Evaluation Methods *(describe either formal surveys or anecdotal audience feedback used)*
  - Communications Outcomes *(isolate PR impacts to assess changed opinions, attitudes, behaviors)*

Communications Challenge/Opportunity

The North Carolina State Ports Authority (NCSPA) encompasses the seaports of Wilmington and Morehead City, plus inland terminals in Charlotte and the Piedmont Triad. Our mission is to enhance the economy of North Carolina by providing access to the global shipping marketplace.

Logistics managers, shippers and receivers need to get their information quickly and efficiently. Our previous business website was cluttered and made it difficult for visitors to quickly find the information they needed. To increase ease of use for website visitors and to set us apart as a port with an eye to the future, we redesigned and reorganized our website, ncports.com.

Planning and Programming

Goal: To increase online ease of use for NCSPA customers and stakeholders and in turn, benefit the business operations of NCSPA.

Target Audiences:

Primary: Potential and existing shippers and receivers, government agencies, economic developers and transportation/logistics workers

Secondary: Media, job seekers, vendors, general public

Objectives:

- To better organize content available on the homepage of ncports.com as well as streamline information for shippers and receivers in appropriate areas throughout the site.
- To show the NCSPA as an organization that understands what its customers are looking for when they come to its website.
- To show the ports of Wilmington and Morehead City as valuable and effective resources for businesses and other stakeholders.

Actions Taken and Communication Outputs

Prior to developing the website, we conducted research to learn more about how our internal and external audiences use our website and what types of information they weigh as most important. We found that many of our internal website users – including those who maintain site content – found the site to be confusing and overloaded with dated or unimportant information.

The result of these user interviews was that we needed to distinguish ourselves as an organized, easy-to-use ocean shipping and inland transportation agency. We needed to show users our knowledge of the industry from the first experience on the homepage. This insight guided the site's organization and overall appearance.

We also spent time reviewing peer-port websites to see what types of features, functionality and information is provided on their respective sites. We used this information to form a content management system that requires only the most important information for posting and a site map that organizes content in a more hierarchical fashion.

Our signature feature on ncports.com is the functionality of homepage tiles. We used photography of our facilities as the central feature, and we wanted to promote that there is more to our operations than what meets the eye. To accomplish this, all homepage tiles can be rolled over to reveal more information.

We added visual elements from our microsite, ourncports.com, which was created last year to speak to economic developers and business leaders across the state. We wanted to create more consistency between our sites so that audiences can go back and forth between them without feeling like they are receiving information from two different organizations.

We also created a new customer portal on the site, which houses all information relevant to our customers and potential customers including real-time weather and tide information, a comprehensive service provider directory updated regularly, sailing schedules, eCargo tools and an online TWIC form. By putting relevant information at our customers' fingertips, we hope to increase usability and efficiency.

All of the features on ncports.com work in tandem to promote the concept that NCSPA has a deep understanding of the businesses and stakeholders it works with on a daily basis. By providing relevant information in a well-organized fashion to our target audiences, our website is much easier to use and separates us from other competing ports.

Implementation Plan

NCPorts.com was redesigned with the help of our outside public relations agency, Capstrat, in Raleigh, NC. Capstrat began user interviews, content auditing and competitive research in August 2011. The new site launched in March 2012, and planning for advertisements to increase traffic to the site is included in a new contract beginning FY 2013. The existing budget allows for comprehensive analytics reporting so that adjustments to site structure and organization can be addressed as needed in the coming months.

Since ncports.com is our main homepage for business operations, our internal IT team worked closely with Capstrat to ensure there was not a lapse of time where the site was not available to users. The transition to the new platform was seamless and our day-to-day business – particularly TWIC security information gathering – was not affected by the change.

Until additional advertising can be done to promote the site, we continue promoting the website in our presentations to stakeholders across the state and in all marketing and communications materials we distribute. Our redesigned website allows us to better connect with our customers and various stakeholder groups – reiterating the message that NCSPA understands the information its customers are seeking and will make this information readily available.

Evaluation Methods and Communications Outcomes

We continue to work with Capstrat to measure traffic to the site since its launch on March 22, 2012 There have been more than 13,000 visits so far – more than 40 percent of these visits were first-time visitors to the site. We have also seen that people are spending more time on the site than they were previously, which suggests that users are more engaged with content. Since launch, visitors have spent an average of nearly four minutes on the site – almost double the amount of time they were spending this time last year.

We continue to tweak and update the site to optimize user experience. Our content management system allows us to remove irrelevant or dated information quickly, as well as add important information – including emergency messages – in a matter of moments.

We have received positive feedback from our audiences on the new structure of the site, and we look forward to gathering additional data to optimize user experience. Our redesigned site allows us to speak directly to our audiences about our depth of industry knowledge, personalized customer service and ease of use. This is a step forward for NCSPA as we continue to improve facilities, operations, and the customer experience for the future.