2017 AAPA Communications Awards
Entry Classification: Website
portofcc.com

Summary

Port Corpus Christi's website was designed in late 2007 to early 2008, and. Utilizing the same template, the website was refreshed in 2012. With technology rapidly changing, the website needed upgrades for several reasons. Addressing website access and responsiveness were of utmost importance in keeping ahead in this fast moving realm.

When it was designed, the website was placed under the IT Department. Port staff had to request changes to the website through the IT Department, which through no fault of theirs, was a slow process and required oversight from the Communications Department. The IT Department was inundated with updates, on top of their already busy schedules.

Because the website was designed before mobile friendly software had been developed, the website was not responsive, and therefore did not change sizes to fit the viewing screen. In 2015, Google began ranking sites with mobile-friendly access at the top of search results page. It was becoming imperative to upgrade the site to remain competitive.

In late 2015, the Port began discussing the possibility of budgeting for redesigning the website and moving the site under the supervision of Communications. This would allow quicker content updates, and give the entire Port flexibility to change or add webpages, having a person on staff with web development knowledge.

The Port moved forward with the budgeting, and the process began to research other Port websites.

1. The specific communications challenges or opportunities

Port Corpus Christi was excited to take on this new opportunity, but there were some challenges in front of the project.

- What is the main purpose of the website?

- What does staff need from the website?

- What were the technical requirements and expectations of the website?

- What parts of the current website need to migrate to the new site?

To begin proper planning of the website, the Communications staff needed to understand how the redesigned website would be used, gather staff's input and wish list, work with the IT Department to get an understanding of the more technical aspects of hosting a website of this magnitude, and review pages developed by IT for public notice posts that would need to migrate as-is to the new site.
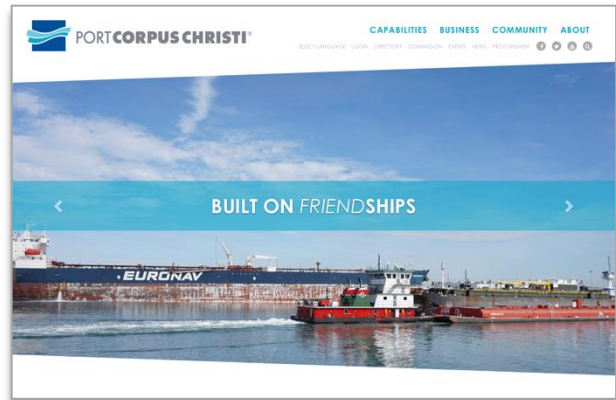
2. How this entry complements the Port's overall mission

The mission of Port Corpus Christi is: To leverage commerce to drive prosperity. The Port wanted a website that could keep up with the business opportunities in the industry; a site that helps staff do their job for the end goal: drive prosperity for the region.

The vision of the Port is: To be *the* energy port of the Americas and the business-to-business tagline is *Moving America's Energy*. The Port wanted a website that engaged this new vision and tagline; vibrant, clean, and with content synergistic to its business.

3. Communications planning and programming components

Website goals and desired results

The overall goal was to develop a website with updated content that supports port business and operations.

Campaign Objectives

- To be a tool for business development

- To highlight Port projects

- To be a resource for the community

Research

The Port researched other Port websites to review sitemap, organization, and design.

Some websites that stood out in the research were:

- Port of Seattle: The site is modern with an interesting homepage slider. This port has a cruise terminal, and caters to tourists as well. The committee liked the modern design and graphics.
  https://www.portseattle.org/Pages/default.aspx
- Port of Long Beach: This site didn't offer as much in the design or graphics area, however the committee noted the sitemap and menu. http://polb.com
- Port of Houston: Since we've done research, Port of Houston has also updated their website. As one of our closest competitive Gulf Ports, Communications staff reviewed menu and sitemap.
  http://porthouston.com/portweb/

Reviewing other port sites helped the committee understand how the Port CC website should flow for ease of user navigation, what items would take importance, and to begin to envision the sitemap.

Target Audiences

1. The prime target audience is people in the transportation and logistics industry, seeking relevant information in the movement or storage of cargo, using rail, land or sea.
2. The secondary audience is the community or a general audience, seeking information about the port.

4. Actions taken and communication outputs employed

Planning

After the team completed some research, studying other websites and meeting with the IT Department regarding hosting and other technical items, the next action was to begin developing a sitemap.

Sitemap: an organized list of webpages accessible to users, utilized as a planning tool before development of a site begins.

In the sitemap phase, "pages" are words on a sheet, so they can easily be moved, changed or deleted without any loss of development hours.

A sitemap can go though many alterations before development of a website begins.

Part of the planning phase included the design of the website. After the sitemap was nearly finalized, the design of the website could be initiated knowing how pages would work and flow with the design.

The design phase includes some functionality planning of internal pages, including items like tiles at the bottom of pages linking to other pages and sales team contacts.

Development

After the sitemap and design was approved by Port staff, development of the site could begin. This is the bulk of the work where pages are developed, photos are chosen, content is loaded, and functionality is tested.
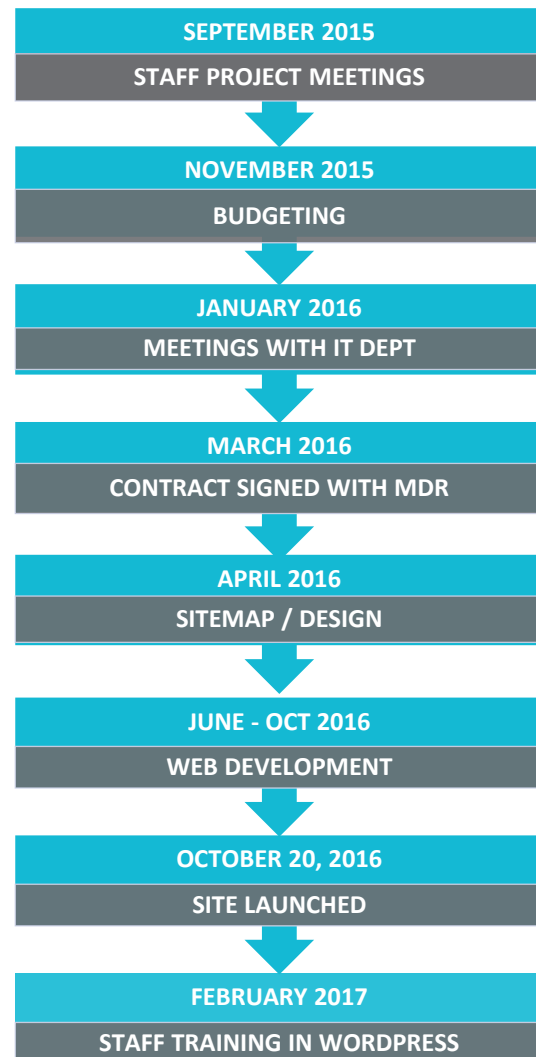
Strategy

The Port's strategy for the website was to utilize a Content Management System (CMS) to develop the website. By using a CMS, the Port would be able to make updates to text and photos quickly and easily. This strategy supports the overall goal in keeping the website content fresh and updated. It also allows the Port to add pages to the website, giving staff the flexibility to develop more programs and content and have the website support them.

The Tactics

The previous website was built in Joomla, a type of Content Management System. There are other CMS such as WordPress and Drupal. Joomla is a good choice for ecommerce and social networking sites, and requires some understanding of technical skills. Drupal is powerful but requires administrators to have a good understanding of HTML, CSS and PHP (coding language). WordPress is incredibly user friendly. Going back to the goal and strategy, the website was to have fresh content, and staff would be able to easily update it. Port Communications team decided to use WordPress to accomplish both goal and strategy.

The next tactic the Port utilized was to hire a web developer, Morehead Dotts Rybak (MDR), to develop the website in WordPress. MDR has developed many websites, including http://battlefortexas.com and the tourism website, https://portaransas.org. By engaging their experience in web development, and the Communications staff's knowledge of the Port and collaboration with Port staff, the team could develop a robust website.

Timeline

SEPTEMBER 2015
STAFF PROJECT MEETINGS

NOVEMBER 2015
BUDGETING

JANUARY 2016
MEETINGS WITH IT DEPT

MARCH 2016
CONTRACT SIGNED WITH MDR

APRIL 2016
SITEMAP / DESIGN

JUNE - OCT 2016
WEB DEVELOPMENT

OCTOBER 20, 2016
SITE LAUNCHED

FEBRUARY 2017
STAFF TRAINING IN WORDPRESS

5. Communication outcomes and methods used for evaluation

Audience Feedback

User feedback has mostly come in through word of mouth, and the overall feeling is that the new website is awesome. Port employees, and members of the community have commented on the clean new design, and ease of access to pertinent information.

Metrics

The metrics used to measure the success of the website are gathered from Google Analytics, which tracks use of the website. In the charts that follow, parameters shown reflect March 2016, before the new site, and March 2017, after the new site.

SESSIONS (# of times the site is accessed)

13,874	13,412	-3.33%

USERS (# of unique devices that accessed the site)

7,179	6,465	-9.95%

PAGEVIEWS (# of pages viewed overall)

30,525	33,361	9.29%

PAGES PER SESSION (avg. pages viewed/ session)

2.20	2.49	13.06%

SESSION DURATION (avg. time/session)

00:02:22	00:02:55	23.22%

BOUNCE RATE (% of users that accessed 1 page only)

52.26%	46.85%	-10.37%

In reviewing the metrics from Google Analytics, while the number of sessions and users are down), pageviews, pages per session, and session duration are up, meaning users are spending more time with the site.

Bounce rate measures how many users visit the site and leave after viewing only one page. Some websites are designed in a way that bounce rates will naturally be high, such as a blog, where users login to read one entry. However, for the Port, this is an important number to decrease, as we want to encourage users to view more pages. Comparing March 2016 to March 2017, Bounce Rate is 10% lower. According to Google Analytics benchmarks for the Business & Industrial vertical, the average Benchmark Bounce Rate is 56.42%. Port Corpus Christi's website, portofcc.com, is performing 17.87% below industry average, which in this case, is excellent!
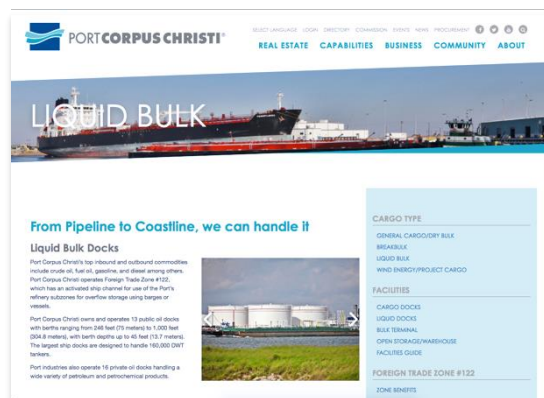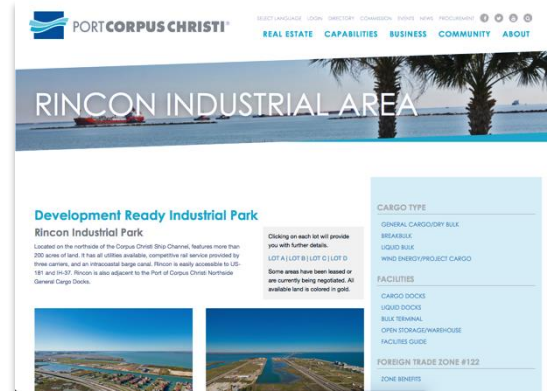
Influence

The port's sphere of influence covers the globe, and we have seen international visits to the website remain steady. The majority of visits come from the United States. Anecdotal evidence suggests that website users find value in the site as on average most viewers are linking to multiple pages within the port's domain during their visit.

Within the community, many people approach Port Corpus Christi communications staff and praise the functionality of the new website. Ease of use and access to plentiful news and information are amongst the most common positive traits noted.

Industry analysts have noted this trend as well. Communications staff are in frequent contact with analysts and reporters. Many folks in these positions have commented on how they make sure to check the Port Corpus Christi website frequently because they know they can find new and relevant information @ http://portofcc.com/.