

Georgia Foreign Trade Conference

Special Event, AAPA Communications Awards Program

Summary

The Georgia Foreign Trade Conference, now in its 49th year, brings together hundreds of attendees from senior level shippers to maritime executives, senior managers and decision-makers representing: ocean carriers, ports, terminal operators, government agencies, financial institutions, shippers, stevedores, railroads, truckers, forwarders, brokers, 3PL's, 4PL's, international port management companies, port consultants, suppliers, site selectors and others critical to the movement of international freight.



1. What are the specific communications challenges or opportunities?

The challenge of the Georgia Foreign Trade Conference is to bring together a line-up of dynamic, informative speakers who will provide valuable insights to attendees, so that the industry professionals who attend will continue coming, and more people will be lured to the conference each year.

A key benefit provided by the conference is the networking opportunities – not only between attendees, but also between GPA executives and the attendees. The GFTC provides a unique experience to share the

strengths of Georgia's logistics network in a low-stress environment where new relationships can be forged and existing relationships strengthened.

2. How does the communication used in this entry complement the organization's overall mission?

The central mission of the Georgia Ports Authority is to support economic development for the state of Georgia. Doing so requires not only logistical infrastructure, but also networks of contacts

necessary to discover and capitalize on new business opportunities. As it is intended to strengthen our business contact networks, the Georgia Foreign Trade Conference provides direct support to the over-arching goal of economic growth.

The GFTC offers business sessions to more than 500 senior level shippers and maritime executives from across North America. Over the course of three days, participants are exposed to business sessions, outstanding networking opportunities, and world-class golf. An elite panel of speakers focuses its remarks on issues facing shippers, carriers, ports, terminals and the maritime community into the next century, as well as the changing legislation and new technologies affecting the way we conduct business.

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The professionalism and world-class expertise exhibited by GFTC speakers is a powerful draw for conference attendees. These decision makers have the power to direct cargo to Georgia's ports. Networking for three days with these powerful executives leads to valuable opportunities to maintain and establish important business relationships.

3. What were the communications planning and programming components used for this entry?

Goal: Bring together national logistics industry leaders

Objectives:

- Provide a multidimensional agenda that attracts a wide range of participants from every level of management.
- Offer sessions about every form of cargo movement.
- Share information on current trending topics in logistics from an international panel of industry leaders, practitioners and analysts to explore present and future market conditions and growth opportunities.
- Provide opportunities to build relationships with prospects and service providers.

Primary Audience: Current and potential port users

Secondary Audience: Trade Publication Media

4. What actions were taken and what communication outputs were employed in this entry?

The Georgia Foreign Trade Conference



draws nearly 500 logistics professionals who attend the conference and 25 business leaders who speak and present at the conference each year to the Cloister at Sea Island Georgia.

Planning each year begins about eight months before the February conference. The conference is organized completely by GPA communications and trade development staff, including the following committees:

- Program Committee (7 members) selects topics, speakers, and panelists
- Host Committee (3 members) coordinates venues for all aspects of conference
- Finance Committee (16 members) secures sponsors
- Publicity Committee (4 members) maintains website, creates advertising and collateral material
- Special Events Committee (6 members) coordinates networking events

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- Registration Committee (3 members) handles registration and speaker/advisor accommodations
- Advisory Committee (11 members) Logistics professionals who work with GPA on business topics



At least six months in advance, session topics are determined for the 14 business sessions. The topics are chosen based on trends in logistics and industry demands including current trade issues. Business sessions at 2017 GFTC included challenges facing carriers and BCOs, economic outlook, updates from the State of Georgia, the automotive industry outlook, carrier industry update, and Georgia success stories.

Along with the business sessions, the conference offered 15 options for networking events.

Guest speakers were secured and included Georgia Governor Nathan Deal, former Navy commander and author Mike Abrashoff, Football Legend Herschel Walker, Alphaliner Executive Consultant Tan Hua Joo, Jones Lang LaSalle Ph.D., Chief Economist Walter Kemmsies, and GPA Executive Director Griff Lynch.

The conference addressed all facets of port logistics including carriers, BCOs, and site selection.

Registration was handled through Constant Contact, and for the fourth year in a row the event sold out.

Along with the GeorgiaForeignTrade.com website, GFTC also has social media channels.

5. What were the communications outcomes from this entry and what evaluation methods were used to assess them?

Overall, the 2017 GFTC has again surpassed expectations. In a post-event survey of conference attendees 89% rated the event Excellent and another 10% rated it good. Survey results consist of responses from all segments of the maritime industry, all levels of leadership as well as veteran attendees and first time attendees. The comments and suggestions will assist with future planning.



Survey highlights:

- The survey was sent to 344 people and had a response rate of 27% (130).
- 89% of those who responded rated registration on gaports.com using Constant Contact to be “Easy.”

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- The registration and check-in experience was rated “Excellent”
- Georgia Ports Authority Executive Director Griff Lynch (104 votes), Herschel Walker (93 votes), and former Navy Commander Mike Abrashoff (82 votes) received the highest speaker ratings.



Comments from a few of the 217 companies that attended:

“Once again one of the best conferences in the industry. Great content, opportunities to network and all in a great location. I look forward to it every year, and have not been disappointed yet. Great work!”

“Best industry conference I’ve attended in terms of information covered, networking opportunities, setting and overall balance of work/activity enjoyment. A fantastic effort by the GPA staff and I look forward to attending future events.”

“Great opportunity to meet senior level colleagues in our industry. I absolutely loved the addition of motivational speakers this year to the agenda. Inspiring.”

Seven influential trade media outlets covered GFTC, including:

American Journal of Transportation
American Shipper