

2016 State of the Port

Special Events, AAPA Communications Awards Program

Summary

Georgia Ports Authority's annual State of the Port event brings together more than 1,300 representatives from the economic development, banking, real estate, and logistics industries, along with the media. GPA brings these people together, along with local and state elected officials, to interact with potential clients, share a message of port growth and statewide economic development, and reinforce the message that the ports and the Savannah Harbor Expansion Project are vital to Georgia's economic health.

The event includes a presentation from GPA's Executive Director Griff Lynch who shares GPA's dynamic message of growth and relevance, throughout the Southeast.

More information about the event including the presentation and videos are available here: <https://goo.gl/iUNdnV>.

1. What are the specific communications challenges or opportunities?

The challenge of this annual event is to address the current business issues and trends, while keeping the event itself feeling new and exciting each year.

The State of the Port event draws state and local business leaders who have long been hearing the message of growth at the Port

of Savannah. One of the challenges this year was to explain the fact that, after 75% of cargo diverted to Savannah in 2015 during West Coast labor negotiations shifted back to the West, a 1.6% drop in annual container trade actually constituted a win for Savannah in 2016: Retaining a quarter of the diverted cargo for the longer term,

while building enough new business to remain virtually level with the record-breaking previous year.

The Savannah State of the Port is a can't-miss event for those who hope to win business or political favor in

Southeast Georgia and attracts legislators in office as well as those running for office.

The event message sets the tone for GPA's presentations that the executive and sales teams will give during the following year.

The 2016 State of the Port was particularly momentous, as it was the first year that Executive Director Griff Lynch delivered the presentation as the new leader of the GPA. The State of the Port was an important roll-out opportunity for the new leader and his positive, energetic message. That energy was reflected in the opening video touting GPA's competitive advantages, and in the presentation message, which unveiled a striking initiative in which Savannah will double its rail lift capacity and greatly ramp up its efforts to win new business in the U.S. Midwest.





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

The mission of the GPA is to support economic development in Georgia. The State of the Port presentation demonstrates to business and government leaders in each region the vital role the ports play in the state's economy.

Another facet of GPA's mission is to move

goods efficiently in order to support trade.

Sufficient infrastructure

is necessary

to ensure

capacity

exceeds

demand and

cargo flows

freely. The

Savannah

Harbor Expansion Project is an

infrastructure project of national

significance. It is vital to share SHEP

progress with stakeholders so they have

confidence that GPA is evolving with an

industry that is shifting to larger and larger

vessels.

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

Goals:

- Showcase GPA's corporate achievements as a profitable investment, strong economic engine

and global logistics gateway for the state of Georgia.

- Demonstrate GPA's commitment to preparing for tomorrow's needs today with the Savannah Harbor Expansion Project, a massive rail expansion and other landside investments.
- Generate support for international trade through the Port of Savannah

by educating community leaders on the opportunities created for the state's farmers, factories and retailers.

Objectives:

- Sell-out event and attract influencers from around Georgia
- Earned

Media coverage from 150 separate outlets

- 20,000 people reached via social media (double the 2015 reach)

Target Audiences:

The primary audience includes port customers, federal, state and local legislators, business leaders, and other port-related decision makers along with members of local, state and trade media. Secondary audiences include community leaders and members of the maritime community.





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

GPA partners with the Port of Savannah Propeller Club for the event and met with their event committee monthly starting six months out.

GPA's seven-person Corporate Communications staff works closely with a contracted design firm to create an overall theme and look for the event, which is then used on the collateral pieces, tickets, PowerPoint and social media campaign.

Event registration is managed by staff through Constant Contact. Registration opened on July 1 and the first email invitation was sent to past attendees and stakeholders in the beginning of July. The event, the largest to date, was sold out several weeks in advance.

The event was held at The Savannah International Trade and Convention Center, located on the Savannah River across from Historic River Street. Attendees watched loaded vessels pass on their way to Garden City Terminal.

The trade center catered the business lunch. AV including staging, large floating screens, and audio were provided by a contracted AV provider.

Photographers and videographers were contracted to provide photos and video for future use and to make available to the media. An edited video version of the presentation was shared with stakeholders the following day.

Each year, the PowerPoint presentation given by GPA's executive director at the State of the Port event contains the

previous year's business results and is the basis for presentations given during the rest of the year by executives, government affairs officials and sales people.

Job growth in Georgia was a focus of this year's presentation, along with an update on the Savannah Harbor Expansion Project and a bold new initiative to capture new intermodal rail business in the U.S. Midwest. This message, woven into a report of GPA's year in review, ensured stakeholders from all business sectors and the media found the information useful.

GPA's Corporate Communications team prepared the presentation as well as comments for the Propeller Club President and Chairman of GPA's Board.

A video, called "America's Fastest Growing Port" was shown before the executive director's presentation. It communicated the unmatched strengths of the ports of Savannah and Brunswick, and the importance of GPA's partners.

A media advisory was sent to local media the day before the event and garnered coverage from the Associated Press, the local daily paper, Savannah Morning News, three TV station WSAV, WJCL, WTOG, Savannah Business Journal, South Magazine and Georgia Public Broadcasting. A press release issued at the time of the event resulted in coverage from national and international trade media.

GPA used social media, not only to advertise the event in advance, and to share interesting facts during the event, but to interact with those attending the event as well.

Those attending the event used the hashtag #SAVSOP to post photos on social media of

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the event as well as photos of themselves and their tables along with quotes from the speakers.

For the second year, the GPA accelerated the printing schedule for the Annual Report so that the visual story would be available as a takeaway from the State of the Port. GPA's Annual Report was placed at every seat.

A separate State of the Port event is held in Brunswick several weeks after the Savannah event. That event utilizes many of the same elements, but targeted to the Brunswick audience.

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

Objective: Sell-out event and attract influencers from around Georgia

Result: The State of the Port event is held at the largest venue in Savannah for a business lunch. For the fifth year in a row the event sold out, well in advance and the team was forced to turn countless people away.

Because of the caliber of attendees, GPA is able to share its message of economic development and the progress of the Savannah Harbor Expansion Project with key stakeholders. The companies who participate often do so year after year. Many purchase tables and bring influential clients.

More than 200 organizations were represented including development authorities from around the state, shipping

lines, national and state agencies and local governments along with three International Longshoremen associations and influential customers like FedEx, The Home Depot, IKEA and Target.

Objective: Earned Media coverage from 100 separate outlets

Result: The event drew media (in the form of executives who purchased tables along with working reporters) from print and broadcast outlets and garnered not only local newspaper and television coverage but clips from trade news organizations across the nation. In all, 196 total reports were filed covering our State of the Port message, from major publications including the New York Times, Journal of Commerce, American Journal of Transportation and the Associated Press.



Objective: 20,000 people reached via social media, up from 10,000 in 2015

Result:

More than **40,000 people were reached** via social media for the 2016 State of the port. This was four times as many as in 2015.



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Facebook:

- 18,712 people reached, up from 3,792 in 2015
- 6,393 people engaged, up from 383 in 2015
- 205 new page likes in the month following the event

Twitter:

- 6,892 reached, up from 2,985 in 2015
- 139 people engaged, up from 71 in 2015
- About 100 new followers in the month following the event

LinkedIn:

- 16,636 people reached, up from 4,445 in 2015
- 213 people interacted with the posts, up from 68 in 2015
- 55 new followers in the month following the event