



## AAPA COMMUNICATIONS AWARDS PROGRAM

North Carolina Ports

Brand Awareness/Launch "Port of Progress" Ad Campaign

Classification: 1. Advertisements

Port Category: 2

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## SHORT, DESCRIPTIVE SUMMARY OF YOUR ENTRY

Over the course of the past two years, North Carolina Ports has completed a brand overhaul. It redesigned its logo, created an identity package, launched the brand to its employees, launched an ad campaign, and a new website. NC Ports is submitting three ads for consideration as a part of this brand relaunch.

- Port of Problem Solved
- Port of Hello, Tomorrow
- Port of Whoa, That was Quick

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## 1. WHAT ARE/WERE THE ENTRY'S SPECIFIC COMMUNICATIONS CHALLENGES OR OPPORTUNITIES

In 2015, North Carolina State Ports Authority set aggressive growth goals for itself. The opening of the expanded Panama Canal was fast-approaching, representing a huge opportunity for growth, or failure, for ports on the East Coast. The opportunity that the expanded Panama Canal created for North Carolina Ports was tremendous. With Post-Panamax vessels soon travelling to the East Coast from Asia, North Carolina Ports wanted to be a part of the consideration set for those large container carriers in order for the port to grow and thrive.

However, the NC Ports brand was outdated and not indicative of a brand ready for growth. Leadership at NC Ports made a bold decision to jettison the current brand and undertake a complete brand overhaul. NC Ports knew they had a compelling point of differentiation and story to tell the market to drive growth. But the NC Ports brand faced three challenges:

1. Brand awareness for NC Ports in the industry was very low.
2. The brand look and communications materials were dated, working against the legitimacy of the port and impeding the brand. The brand wasn't something the organization could rally behind, much less, the industry.
3. NC Ports had great equity and customer loyalty among their current customers, so they couldn't lose their core values during the rebrand.

NC Ports set out to tell the market, who they are, what they stand for, and why customers should consider NC Ports through an advertising campaign.

The overall campaign has elevated the status of NC Ports and continues to attract business that wasn't possible with the old brand.

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## 2. HOW DOES THE COMMUNICATION USED IN THIS ENTRY COMPLEMENT THE ORGANIZATIONS'S OVERALL MISSION?

*The mission of the North Carolina State Ports Authority is to enhance the economy of the State of North Carolina. The Ports Authority will be managed like a business, focused on the requirements of its customers. North Carolina's Ports are recognized for self-sustaining operations, environmental stewardship, highly efficient workforce, satisfied customers, and modern, well-maintained facilities and equipment.*

The mission of the Port is to act as an economic driver for the state of North Carolina. In fact, port activities contribute statewide to \$707 million each year in state and local tax revenues and more than 76,000 jobs. Its mission is to work in support of the industries in North Carolina.

The purpose of the rebrand was to aid the port in accelerating growth. Growth of the ports supports growth of the state economy, which is the mission of the port.

During the discovery phase of this project, the mission of the port and its importance to NC Ports employees was very evident. The employees' voice of this mission helped shape the brand positioning, which was used in all pieces created for the brand launch.

Many messages from the mission statement come through in the employee campaign and multiple ad executions:

- Attentive customer service and problem solving are key benefits NC Ports offers its customers.
- Modern equipment and well-maintained facilities were key points in all materials. At launch, NC Ports was in the midst of a dredging project to widen its turning basin to accommodate large Post-Panamax vessels (10,000 TEUs in size), and NC Ports had just opened a new cold storage facility.

With a revived brand identity, NC Ports stood more of a chance to create a positive economic impact on the state of North Carolina.

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## 3. WHAT WERE THE COMMUNICATIONS PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING COMPONENTS USED FOR THIS ENTRY?

### Goals and Desired Results:

The advertising campaign was asked to do a lot for NC Ports. It needed to:

1. Introduce the new NC Ports brand in a clear way
2. Establish NC Ports as a legitimate player in the market
3. Emphasize the differentiators (Customer Service, Efficiency/Productivity and Infrastructure Improvements)
4. Generate new leads

The leadership at NC Ports understood that advertising and branding alone will not generate new business. However, it can create awareness for the brand, provide legitimacy and get a potential customer to take action. Getting our audience engaged and take action were the desired results.

There were several steps and milestones that had to happen, in a specific order, for this campaign:

- Define the brand positioning and point of differentiation - The brand overhaul started with understanding the true positioning and differentiators that makes NC Ports unique. By interviewing internal employees (from leadership down the line) and current customers, it became clearly evident that NC Ports' focus on customers and helping them solve their transportation needs was what made NC Ports special.
- Create the brand look and feel - NC Ports redesigned their logo and identity package to reflect a more approachable, simple and clear direction. Next, they launched their new positioning and look first to their employees. The employees are the hub of what keeps the Ports growing. Leadership wanted their employees to be the brand ambassadors and advocates.
- Launch the external campaign online and through print advertising - Once employees were supportive of the brand direction, a heavy brand awareness campaign was launched at the same time a new website was created. NC Ports needed to showcase their new voice and look to their target audience. The ad campaign promoted the differentiators of NC Ports – customer focused, efficiency, and growth.

#### Audiences:

##### *Primary*

Carriers and Beneficial Cargo Owners (i.e. shippers)

- Awareness for NC Ports among carriers and BCOs was low; and it's low even among BCOs doing business in North Carolina. Decisions they make about ports of calls are very well thought out – it's a long process that takes into consideration everything from location, the actual cost at the port to available infrastructure, port congestion, customer service, etc. The ultimate total cost of doing business with a particular port drives the overwhelming majority of decisions (whether carrier or BCO), but the ease of working with a port can also play a role; and in some cases, be a tie breaker in the decision (as long as total cost is relatively similar). Given the complexity of choosing a particular port, once a decision is made, it sticks for a while.

##### *Secondary*

Current Carrier and Beneficial Cargo Owners

- Carriers and BCOs enjoy doing business with NC Ports. They see the benefits from a customer service level, but they also need to be reminded of all that NC Ports has to offer and how they will help make them successful. The advertising campaign needed to showcase all the benefits and changes happening at the Port to reassure them that NC Ports is going to be a major player in the market for years to come.

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## 4. WHAT ACTIONS WERE TAKEN AND WHAT COMMUNICATION OUTPUTS WERE EMPLOYED IN THIS ENTRY?

Knowing brand awareness was low among NC Port's target audiences and NC Ports had a new, refreshed brand, getting the advertising in front of as many eyes as possible was the overall goal. NC Ports focused their brand awareness campaign in the major logistics publications (print and digital). The paid media plan included a number of full-page placements in different publications:

- American Journal of Transportation
- Journal of Commerce
- Logistics Management
- Business NC

By focusing the media buy on these publications, NC Ports was able to reach top decision makers in both the Beneficial Cargo Owner and Carrier spaces. This ad campaign launched in June 2016, and has had a steady media frequency since.

Additionally, the strategy was to rotate creative messages to these audiences to stay top-of-mind. NC Ports rotated 3 different print ads that focused on different benefits of working with the Port (Customer Service, Speed/Efficiency, and Infrastructure Improvements). This strategy proved to be beneficial for NC Ports.

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## 5. WHAT WERE THE COMMUNICATIONS OUTCOMES FROM THE ENTRY AND WHAT EVALUATION METHODS WERE USED TO ASSESS THEM?

NC Ports has heard, anecdotally, across the industry that the new brand adds a new level of professionalism. Quantitatively, the port has received 78 new phone calls in the first 6 months of the new campaign, and 158 calls in the first 11 months as a result of phone number tracking on the ads.

Additionally, the NC Ports website has seen a steady rise in site sessions, which indicates an increase in brand awareness as a result of the ad campaign and increased editorial coverage.

### Overall Brand Impact

The overall brand rebuild (including website, promotional materials, advertising campaign, and marketing tactics) have led, in part, to monumental changes in cargo throughput for North Carolina Ports. In the grand scheme, this was the intent. The more cargo moving through the North Carolina Ports, the stronger economic impact the ports are having on the State of North Carolina's economy.

North Carolina Ports have four new container services coming online this spring/summer, essentially doubling the amount of container services it had back in the Fall of 2016. This means record throughput for Fiscal Year 2017 and that further legitimizes the Port of Wilmington as a major player on the U.S. East Coast.