



AAPA COMMUNICATIONS AWARDS PROGRAM

North Carolina Ports

ncports.com Website

Classification: 15. Websites

Port Category: 2

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 launched a new website.

The website, ncports.com launched in October 2016. The website reflected a new brand positioning, messaging strategy, logo, design look and feel, responsive design, and functionality. The new site serves as a new business tool to generate interest and leads for the brand as well as a tool for existing customers.

Pages for consideration include:

Homepage: <http://ncports.com/>

- Provides a clean landing page for users, with a clear navigation path for more information or access to tools.

Capabilities page: <http://ncports.com/port-capabilities/>

- Provides an overview of the capabilities, improvements, and services at the ports.

Port of Wilmington page: <http://ncports.com/port-facilities/port-of-wilmington/>

- Provides specific information about the Port of Wilmington, including capabilities, facts, location information, and directions.

Port Access page: <http://ncports.com/customer-tools/port-access/>

- Provides necessary information for a port visitor, including gate information, contact information, escort forms, and safety information.

Service Provider Directory page: <http://ncports.com/customer-tools/service-provider-directory/>

- Provides a user-friendly interactive directory of businesses and organizations that can make working with North Carolina Ports more effective, efficient and profitable.

Library page: <http://ncports.com/about-the-ports/library/>

- Provides a singular page for accessing images, videos, and brochure downloads for NC Ports.

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, including the website, 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. Their website would be a crucial element for telling the brand story.

Websites are arguably one of the most important marketing tools that a business has. They are often the first point of interaction that customers have with a brand.

The previous NC Ports website had a dated look. Finding content and key customer tools was a challenge. The site was dark in color and not inviting to users.

When NC Ports created a new logo, positioning and messaging strategy, it was imperative that they have a website that was reflective of their new direction. The website would help NC Ports tell its story, grow, and play a crucial role in the branding and awareness ad campaign that would launch.

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 website for North Carolina Ports is an important business tool used to drive interest for the brand and the port; create understanding among potential customers about capabilities; be a tool for current customers; and share the NC Ports story to those in the community. Just like the ports enhance the economy of the state, the website enhances the story and mission of the ports to customers. The website's messaging focuses on how it serves the many unique needs of unique customers, how it serves customers efficiently, how it provides efficient access to transportation networks in the Southeast, how it maintains its equipment and facilities to stay up to date with the rapidly changing shipping industry, how it impacts the economy of North Carolina, and how its employees are at the heart of what they do.

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

Goals and Desired Results:

The website has to play many roles for NC Ports. The goals of the site are to:

1. Help drive new business for NC Ports
2. Reflect the forward-moving direction of the organization/brand (from a visual and personality perspective)
3. Provide quick, easy access to information and tools that various audiences need

The website would accomplish these goals by:

- Having an easy-to-navigate experience that provides all the important information for the different target audiences (knowing that the audiences are seeking different information)
- Setting an exciting tone for the NC Ports organization both internally and externally
- Incorporating SEO best practice fundamentals

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

- Define the brand positioning and point of differentiation
- Create the brand look and feel
- Define the audiences and which pieces were priority to each audience
- Create the site structure based on how each audience would use the site
- Create the content, including SEO best practices
- Build, develop, and test the site
- Launch the site

Audiences:

Primary

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

- Awareness for NC Ports among carriers and BCOs was low. NC Ports needed to share its capabilities with these audiences to make a compelling case to consider NC Ports. Users in this audience might use the site to learn about the capabilities and facilities of the Port, understand rates and fees, download brochures and information, and hopefully, fill out a form to be contacted by a port representative.

Secondary

Current Carrier and Beneficial Cargo Owners

- Current BCOs and Carriers would take advantage of the cargo tools located on the site, such as the container tracker. This user required easy access to the tools to locate their cargo and understand the facilities.
- Truck Drivers use the NC Ports website frequently to prepare for arrival at NC Ports, find facilities maps and information, check gate hours/access/credential information, fill out a TWIC

escort form, check container status, and check the sailing schedule for loads they are expecting to pick up.

- Members of the North Carolina General Assembly use the website to understand the Ports' strategic, economic and business importance to the state, capabilities/facilities information, and contact information.
- The General Public looks for general information about the ports and their impact on their communities as well as career and job information.
- Employees use the site to view videos and news about the Port.

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

NC Ports was in the midst of a brand overhaul, which meant the website needed to be built from scratch – not only in design but also in content.

NC Ports hired its agency HMM to define the structure of the new site and also design a look and feel that complemented the new logo and brand positioning. NC Ports and HMM looked at the challenges of the previous site and examined feedback from current site users. Then NC Ports and HMM determined which pages needed priority access for the various audiences and site users.

After an SEO audit, HMM determined the information architecture or the site structure for the new site. Content was re-organized to provide a capabilities overview for customer prospects, followed by information on North Carolina's two port locations, followed by tools for current customers, and other information that the general public and the general assembly would seek.

The homepage was designed to feature need-it-now content for both prospects and customers alike so that information was always at a user's fingertips when they visit. For potential customers, the "Capabilities" page had a priority location on the homepage to drive visitors there. Additionally, links to the "Terminal Operating System" and "Port Access" information were given priority in the persistent header at the top of the page for recurring users or port customers who access those pages frequently. Also on the homepage is a link to the TWIC Escort form, which is also a high traffic area on the site. The site was designed to help the user navigate easily through the site.

The website went from discovery phase, SEO and information architecture, wireframe development, content development, design, development and finally to launch over the course of 6 months. The site launched in October 2016.

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

Since the launch of the site, there has been a steady 25% increase in the number of monthly site sessions which indicates an increase in brand awareness as a result of the ad campaign and editorial coverage. The website experiences a high level of engagement with tools for prospects and current customers.

- For prospects, an average of 150 PDF brochure downloads per month indicates new business prospects are actively seeking information on the website.
- For current customers, analytics show high levels of interaction with customer tools related to visiting the port, such as calling live phone numbers, submitting TWIC escort forms, and visiting the Port Access page for information about gate times and directions.

The site is set up to accommodate users in different stages of their relationship with NC Ports. The metrics show that users in different stages are interacting with the site as anticipated. New users are interacting with capabilities and information content. While current customers are interacting with tools.

The analytics of the site speak volumes about the overall success of the new North Carolina Ports brand, brand awareness efforts, as well as its commitment to making doing business with North Carolina Ports easy.

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.