



AAPA COMMUNICATIONS AWARDS PROGRAM

North Carolina Ports

Brand Launch Campaign

Classification: 8. Overall Campaign

Port Category: 2

SHORT, DESCRIPTIVE SUMMARY OF YOUR ENTRY

Over the course of the past two years, NC 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 materials for its brand launch campaign, including:

- A new logo
- Identity Package
 - o Business cards
 - o Letterhead and envelope
 - o Executive stationary
 - o PowerPoint template
- Employee Brand Launch Campaign
 - o Posters (4)
 - o Mantra card
 - o T-shirts
 - o Coffee mugs
 - o Bags
 - o Car magnet
- Ad Campaign
 - o Port of Problem Solved
 - o Port of Hello, Tomorrow
 - o Port of Whoa, That was Quick
 - o Port of Doing What It Takes
- Website
 - o ncports.com

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 widened Panama Canal was fast-approaching, representing a huge opportunity for growth, or failure, for ports on the East Coast. The opportunity that the widened 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However, the NC Ports brand was outdated and not indicative of a brand ready for growth.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. There was little brand awareness for NC Ports, outside of its current customer base.

2. The brand look, website 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 was ready to tell its organization and the market, who they are, what they stand for, and why customers should consider NC Ports.

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 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, problem solving, and efficiency are key benefits NC Ports offers its customers.
- Modern equipment and well-maintained facilities and equipment 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.

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

In 2015, North Carolina State Ports Authority set aggressive growth goals for itself. The opening of the widened Panama Canal was fast-approaching, representing a huge opportunity for growth, or failure, for ports on the East Coast. The opportunity that the widened 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.

Goals and Desired Results:

The goal of this campaign was to support growth of the Port. The objectives of the Port were to:

1. Define and introduce the new NC Ports brand
2. Establish NC Ports as a legitimate player in the industry
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 to take action were the desired results.

Milestones:

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
- Create the brand look and feel
- Announce the brand to employees
- Launch the external campaign online and through print advertising

Audiences:

Primary

ALL Employees at North Carolina State Ports Authority

- Employees in Wilmington, Morehead City, Charlotte, Greensboro, across North Carolina, and even in South Korea! They are proud of the work they are doing and the opportunity for the Port to become more successful. NC Ports knew that a strong brand starts at the core – with its most valuable asset, its employees. With employee buy-in of the brand, NC Ports would live its brand and translate it externally.

Potential Carrier and Beneficial Cargo Owners

- Awareness for NC Ports among carriers and BCOs was low. Decisions they make about ports of calls are very well thought out. Given the complexity of choosing a particular port, once a

decision is made, it sticks for a while. The brand and advertising campaign needed to create awareness and establish credibility for the Ports.

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.

Buy-in from an organization's most valuable asset, its employees, is imperative to the success of a brand launch and brand campaign to the industry. One could not happen without the other.

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

When NC Ports embarked on its brand overhaul, NC Ports already knew its key messages and what differentiated the brand from other East Coast Ports. To affirm (or deny) those beliefs, the first step NC Ports undertook was to define who they were in a brand positioning study. NC Ports hired HMM Agency to lead the brand positioning study and to create a marketing plan with the strategies and communications to launch the brand internally and to the industry.

For the brand positioning study, HMM completed a competitive audit, held one-on-one interviews with key staff members to examine attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions followed by interviews with key customers.

With a positioning defined and a direction approved, NC Ports and HMM were ready to design a new, modernized logo and create materials to launch the new brand to their most influential voice: their employees. The employee-focused communications were launched at an employee appreciation event in summer 2016 and these communications pieces included an introduction to the new logo, a card with a mantra reflecting the brand ethos, posters that doubled as office décor and merchandise that allowed employees to wear their brand-devoted hearts on their sleeves.

By anchoring the brand introduction with the Ports' most natural and perhaps powerful brand ambassadors, NC Ports created momentum and excitement for both the work and the Ports' big changes, which included a turning basin expansion project to accommodate larger ships coming through the newly expanded Panama Canal.

Then the time came to announce the new NC Ports brand and infrastructure improvements to the industry. A full brand awareness campaign with three print ads and one animated digital banner ad launched in key industry publications, like the American Journal of Transportation, the Journal of Commerce, and Logistics Management.

Another key piece of the brand awareness launch was the ncports.com website launch. HMH and NC Ports worked together to define a strategy where the site would function as both a new business and prospecting tool to generate business leads, and also as a tool for current customers to do business with the port. Campaign materials would lead readers to the new site.

Brand positioning work started in late summer 2015 with work on the employee launch, ad campaign and website following. The new NC Ports brand awareness campaign and website was timed to launch a few months before the busy holiday shipping season and to correspond with the opening of the expanded Panama Canal.

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

The launch of the brand positioning, awareness campaign and website has been an all-around success.

Employee Launch

When the brand launch materials were presented to employees at the employee event, it generated a lot of excitement for the NC Ports brand. Employees could see physical changes happening at the Port with construction and dredging for the new turning basin, but the new logo and promotional materials generated a sense of pride among employees. Posters distributed at the event were soon displayed in employees' offices, and even in cranes. One poster even became a good luck charm that employees would tap on their way to the port terminal, almost like football players do before a game.

Ad campaign

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.

Website

Since the launch of the site, there has been a 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 analytics of the site speak volumes about the overall success of the new NC Ports brand, and brand awareness efforts, as well as its commitment to making doing business with the 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.