



VIRGINIA PORT AUTHORITY

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AAPA Communications Awards Submission

Category: Annual Reports

Summary of Entry: A high-level, engaging and approachable overview of The Port of Virginia's Fiscal Year 2016 performance. Shaped like a shipping container and full of captivating imagery paired with short, easy-to-digest articles that focus equally on WHY we do what we do as much as HOW we did it.

I. What are/were the entry's specific communications challenges or opportunities?

Last year, we created the port's first-ever annual report. It was well-received by its intended audiences (Business leaders, elected officials, and maritime industry members).

We were also honored with a 2016 AAPA Communication Award of Distinction for our inaugural effort.

Fiscal Year 2016 was a year of milestones and momentum for The Port of Virginia: we had a positive financial outcome for the second consecutive year; we were safe while handling a record-setting amount of cargo; rail volume grew by 10 percent – overtaking NY/NJ to become #1 in rail volume; we welcomed our first vessel to transit the new, wider Panama Canal; and we continued our focus on improving service. Most notably, we embarked on a \$670 project that is the largest capacity-building project in our history.

Taken individually, each of those items can be a lot to unpack. When you combine them into one report, a great deal of care must be undertaken to ensure that readers aren't overwhelmed with data and jargon, and that the big picture isn't lost.

We created this annual report to help convey that sense of momentum and mission in a document that helped educate and engage our audiences regarding our fiscal responsibility, operation excellence, and sustainable growth.

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

The Port of Virginia's mission is as follows:

Guided by our company values, The Port of Virginia will achieve our shared vision of operational excellence, fiscal responsibility, and sustainable growth. Above all, we will remain responsible members of the communities we serve, a valuable resource to our customers, an excellent place to work, and an economic engine for the region.

This annual report shares our vision with our stakeholders, as well as provides documented evidence of our commitment to our mission via operational facts and stats, budgetary performance, and our sustainability efforts. Further, it helps educate our audiences as to our commitment to our communities, our colleagues, and the Commonwealth via digestible articles and engaging graphics.

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

The goal of this piece was to provide our stakeholders with an easy-to-read report that provided concise and tangible evidence of our continued success (“momentum”).

Our audiences for this piece were as follows:

- Local and Regional Business leaders
- Businesses that currently or could potentially use the port
- Elected officials at the local, state and federal levels

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

The theme of this year’s annual report was “momentum.” From our CEO’s opening letter, to the closing letter from the Chairman of our Board of Commissioners, each article stayed close to that theme: sharing how we’ve built on the successes of the past two years (after seven consecutive years of losses) to achieve a year full of major milestones.

To ensure the articles were written in a way that was easily digestible and approachable, we worked with a local marketing/advertising agency to write the articles for the report. Colleagues from the port worked with the agency to determine the structure of the report, and then served as resources/interview subjects to provide the information needed to write the articles. We asked the agency to keep articles near the 350-word limit in order to accomplish two objectives:

- 1) Keep articles at a manageable length
- 2) Force us to quickly get to the heart of each article.

We then employed the same distribution model we used last year – working with our local business weekly publication (“Inside Business”) to insert copies of the annual report in over 8,000 copies of in a December issue of the magazine. Additionally, we sent copies along with personalized letters to:

- a. stakeholders in local, state and federal government offices. (sent by our Government Affairs Team)
- b. existing and potential port customers, economic development directors, and site selectors (sent by our Economic Development Team)
- c. Shipline executives, Motor Carriers, Labor Partners and Beneficial Cargo Owners (BCOs) (sent by our Commercial and Operations teams)

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

Anecdotally, we’ve received a great number of compliments from our intended audiences.

Additionally, we know that 8,000 subscribers to Inside Business – the regional business publication and representative of a large portion of our targeted audience – received a copy along with their December 5, 2016 issue of Inside Business.

Further, our site analytics show that 1,642 unique visitors viewed the annual report on our website – spending an average of three minutes viewing the report.