

2018 AAPA Communications Award Program

Entry title: Port of Vancouver USA Virtual Holiday Greeting 2017

Entry classification: Miscellaneous

Summary

This past holiday season, the Port of Vancouver USA decided to approach its annual holiday communication to tenants, customers, partners and the community in a new and exciting way.

Rather than send an email or post a video as in previous years, we decided to create something fun and seasonal that could be enjoyed during a busy workday, reflect our mission and capture the holiday spirit.



The result was an immersive and interactive online experience—an animated “winter wonderland” page within the port’s website, www.portvanusa.com, that recipients were invited to visit via email. They could click on the page’s visual elements to further animate the design and reveal hidden messages. Animation included music, snow, a train moving down a track, and an “Open Me!” envelope swinging from a mobile harbor crane that contained a Port of Vancouver-themed holiday poem with audio.

While we were strategic with this communication by including key port messages and taking an innovative approach to its execution, our goals for it were simple: connect with recipients in a light and engaging way, express our gratitude for a great year and spread some holiday cheer.

View the holiday greeting here: <http://portvanusa.com/holiday/2017/>

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

Opportunities:

- The holidays always give us an opportunity to show a lighter side to our key audiences. While we pride ourselves on our operational rigor and marine/industrial expertise, we like to have a little fun, too. This can help audiences connect with the port on a different level and provide some educational opportunities.
- This communication offered us an opportunity to show our partners, tenants and the public that we embrace innovation. We strive to be innovative in our approach to infrastructure and business, so it was a natural extension to be innovative with this greeting through the use of technology.

Challenges:

- Building the web page in a relatively short timeframe.
- Ensuring the page and its animation functionality would work across various platforms and devices.
- Developing messaging specific to the port's mission but still appropriate for a broad audience.

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

The Port of Vancouver USA's mission is to provide economic benefit to our community through leadership, stewardship and partnership in marine, industrial and waterfront development.

The mission was key to guiding the content strategy for this communication. The virtual holiday greeting complemented the port's mission in several ways:

- The design is fun and visually appealing, and reflects the port's business lines, capabilities/assets and key location on the Columbia River (marine/industrial/waterfront).
- The web page's content, while light and seasonal in tone, still emphasized the port's leadership as a good public steward, regional partner and economic engine (leadership/stewardship/partnership).
- The content also referenced our Waterfront Project—a popular 10-acre commercial development that is highly anticipated by the community, and will bring jobs and economic benefit to the region.

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

The goals, objectives and desired results of this card:

- Communicate holiday greetings and gratitude to our key audiences.
- Engage with our tenants, customers, partners and members of the greater Vancouver, Washington, community in a fun, innovative and unexpected way.
- Reflect the port's mission and vision.
- Measurable year-over-year increase in email opens and click-throughs from our 2016 holiday greeting.

A link to the virtual card was sent directly to 887 recipients via email. The card was also forwarded to approximately 600 others by port staff.

Audiences included:

- Tenants, customers and industry partners (primary): A range of recipients across industries, ranging from small businesses to major clients.
- Community members (secondary): Residents and businesses across the greater Vancouver area, with whom we have previously communicated and/or have signed up for electronic newsletters.

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

The port's External Affairs team worked closely with a regional creative agency to bring this communication to life.

Strategy:

Creative an immersive, engaging, and interactive online experience to wish our tenants, customers, partners and community happy holidays.

Timing and Tactics:

- Early November 2017: Brainstorm concepts internally and connect with agency partners; shared key messages to be incorporated
- Mid November 2017: Concept strategy finalized; design and development work begins
- Late November 2017: Refine design and content; quality assurance testing across platforms
- December 12, 2017: Greeting shared with Board of Commissioners, staff and citizens at a public meeting; email with link to virtual greeting delivered to all recipients

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

We measured the success of this communication in several ways:

- 23% increase in email open rate over 2016 open rate
- 19% increase in click-throughs to card from email over 2016 click-throughs
- Positive feedback via reply email from recipients, and in person at port meetings and events. We received more unsolicited feedback about this communication than we have on any previous holiday greeting.

Anecdotal feedback included:

"The Port Holiday Greeting is the sweetest thing we've ever seen!!!"

"Super cute!"

"7 million tons and some makes ale. Cheers to that!"

"We all enjoyed your winter wonderland, thank you and season's greetings."

"That is very COOL! Who is the poet? Merry Christmas to all and to all a good night!"

Several people also referenced the Waterfront Project when mentioning the communication, which was a good indicator of success for our team since the project was only mentioned within a hidden message in the animation.