**AAPA Communications Awards Submission**

**Category: Miscellaneous**

**Summary of Entry:** Instead of bringing people to The Port of Virginia, we created an app that brings the port to the people. It walks users through the $695 million expansion projects at our two largest terminals, as well as sharing customer videos, rail travel times to major markets, and much more.

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

The Port of Virginia is in the middle of a $695 million capacity-building project that will increase our overall annual capacity by 1,000,000 containers – and is doing so while continuing operations at all terminals. It was important for us to be able to show our customers, partners, legislators, stakeholders and colleagues that every aspect of this three-year plan has been mindfully planned to reduce the impacts on each of the respective audiences listed above. Further, we wanted to create a tool that could be used by our HR, Sales, Economic Development, Government Affairs, and operations teams as they told the port story to their respective audiences.

It can be difficult to convey the depth and breadth of information about the importance of ports to the economic health of the country. We designed this app to help “bring the user to the terminals” and show them first-hand what we are doing, and WHY we are doing it.

1. **How does the communication used in this entry complement the organization’s overall mission?**

The Port of Virginia’s mission includes being an economic engine for the commonwealth.

This app shares our mindful expansion plan with our stakeholders in an easy-to-understand manner, 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.

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

We provided the app to our Sales, Economic Development, and Government Affairs teams in early January (in time for General Assembly, and the TPM and RILA conferences). Our colleagues would allow the customer to “drive” by clicking on what was attractive to them, and would allow that to help lead the conversation, rather than “data dumping” information that may not be useful or relevant to their conversation partner.

1. **What actions were taken and what communication outputs were employed in this entry?**
   1. **Explain what strategies were developed to achieve success and why these strategies were chosen.**

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* 1. **Specify the tactics used (i.e., actions used to carry out your strategies).**

Working with Gravity Jack, an app developer and augmented reality expert, we created an application that walks users through the port’s story – starting from where we’re located on the globe, to our location on the East Coast, then down to our terminal locations throughout Virginia. At the terminal level, we provide high-level information on each of our terminals, as well as a sophisticated 3D interactive map of our two largest terminals (Virginia International Gateway, or VIG, and Norfolk International Terminals, or NIT) that allows users to see the construction come up out of the ground via an interactive timeline. We also offered an “augmented reality” version of the 3D experience at VIG and NIT. Users could point their device at a portion of our Sales brochure that would trigger the augmented reality experience – allowing users to walk around the image and see the terminals as if they were standing above and walking around.

We then shared comparative information on other East Coast ports, customer testimonial videos, rail transit times that are “clickable” by users, economic development statistics and much more.

* 1. **Detail the entry’s implementation plan by including timeline, staffing and outsourcing used.**

We began working with Gravity Jack in January 2017 and unveiled the finished app to our Sales, Economic Development, and Government Affairs teams in December so that it could be used during General Assembly (January), RILA (February) and TPM (March).

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

The application is working very well. Anecdotally, it was a success in drawing people to our booths at TPM and RILA (we connected the app to Apple TV and mirrored what was on the ipad screen to a large monitor so passersby could see the app in action and come to the booth for a closer look). Further, we heard from several legislators that seeing/experiencing the app really helped them gain a far better understanding of our efforts prior to our CEO presenting at the Senate Finance and House Appropriations Committee meetings. Both the Senate and House have included $20 million in their proposed budgets for our channel deepening efforts, and we’re hopeful that they will include more to enable us to start the project later this year. We are now using the app at career fairs and during new hire orientation to help educate and engage potential and current port colleagues.

To see the app in action, we encourage you to download and play with the app to your iOS device by clicking the following link: <https://rink.hockeyapp.net/apps/817889c01d9848be96b59c72048b8dee/app_versions/30>

You will need to “trust” the developer in your settings.

You can also see aspects of the app in action at Gravity Jack’s website here: <https://gravityjack.com/portfolio/port-of-virginia/>