

2018 AAPA Communications Award Program

Entry title: Port of Vancouver USA – Connecting with Community through Social Media

Entry classification: Social/Web-Based Media

Summary

The Port of Vancouver USA is many things—a century-old public port, a recognized leader in



marine capabilities and a steward of the local economy. But it's also a collective of hardworking, dedicated people who love what they do and where they live. So how do you tell that story to the public?

Over the last few years, research has shown us that public perception of our port could be improved—too many area residents don't know about the port's impact in the community, how many jobs we create for local residents or our innovative environmental stewardship.

So, in an effort to build, maintain and strengthen connections in the community, we set out to tell our story to the public via social media, implementing a strategy that focused on a more human aspect of the port than in previous years. We maintained our focus on our work and community impact, but made sure to celebrate the people who make it happen along the way.

The results were strong: increases in engagement across social media platforms, more community member attendance at public meetings and an increase in favorability shown through public polling.

1. What are/were the specific communications challenges and opportunities?

When we embarked on this campaign to humanize the port and deepen our connections with the community, we knew we had great opportunities in the volume of work and great stories we could share. We did, however, face several challenges.

Challenges:

- A general increase in negative engagement on various social media channels, from Twitter to Facebook
- News coverage of a port project that became a divisive topic in the community, overshadowing the port's positive work
- Modest budget and limited bandwidth for social media efforts

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 the community through leadership, stewardship and partnership in marine, industrial and waterfront development.

This communication effort complemented our mission by showing the public how we work to achieve that mission every day, and celebrating the efforts of our staff, partners and tenants who make it happen.

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

Goals:

The overall goal of our social media strategy was to build, maintain and strengthen connections with the greater Vancouver, WA community through engaging social media content that celebrated both the port's work and its people.

Objectives:

- Achieve a measurable increase in engagement on social media channels
- Achieve a measurable increase in positive perception of the port in public polling
- Increase in public meeting attendance

Target Audiences:

- Social media users who typically engage with the port in a negative manner (primary)
- Social media users who are neutral or positive toward the port and/or its communications (secondary)

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

Our External Affairs team worked internally to map out a schedule for social media content, leveraging events, holidays, employee activities and achievements as well as key milestones.

Timing and Tactics:

We implemented this strategy in early 2017 and measured through April 2018. Examples of posts and content:

- August 18, 2017: Our staff donating school supplies to the Foundation for Vancouver Public Schools.
 - [Twitter](#)

- September 1, 2017: College pride! For the start of the college football season, our staff wore jerseys of their alma maters.
 - [Twitter](#)
- September 28, 2017: More than 400 fourth-grade students spoke to us about our environmental program at the Columbia Springs Watershed Festival.
 - [Facebook](#)
 - [LinkedIn](#)
 - [Twitter](#)
- October 31, 2017: On Halloween, staff members dressed up as gnomes and posed outside in the shrubs. Port staff like to have fun, too!
 - [Facebook](#)
 - [LinkedIn](#)
 - [Twitter](#)
- November 9, 2017: In support of Veterans Day, we thanked and acknowledged several staff members who served in the military.
 - [Facebook](#)
 - [LinkedIn](#)
 - [Twitter](#)
- February 16, 2018: Our CEO Julianna Marler became one of four women to receive an Iris Award. We congratulated her and celebrated with a post on Facebook.
 - [Facebook](#)
 - [LinkedIn](#)
 - [Twitter](#)
- March 7, 2018: We frequently talk about our commitment to environmental stewardship. This post showed staff participating in a local cleanup activity to demonstrate that we walk our talk.
 - [Facebook](#)
 - [Twitter](#)
- April 26, 2018: We celebrated Take Your Child to Work Day, one of our favorite annual traditions, with 29 kids and 17 parents. Adventures included a tenant tour, equipment derby and environmental stewardship activities!
 - [Facebook](#)
 - [Twitter](#)



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

Results: The primary goal of this social media effort—to generate a measureable increase in community engagement on social media—was achieved.

Measures of success:

- 300% increase in the port’s followers on Facebook (May 2017 – April 2018)
- 30% increase in percentage of engaged users on Facebook (May 2017 – April 2018)
- Increase in positive comments on Facebook posts
- Increase in self-reported familiarity with the port, year over year (Public polling, March 2018)
- Increase in public approval of the port’s job performance, year over year (Public polling, March 2018)
- Increase in attendance at the port’s public meetings (May 2017 – April 2018)
- Increase in sign up for public tours of the port (May 2017 – April 2018)
- Increase in applications for open job positions posted on social media (May 2017 – April 2018)

We also measured the success of this communication effort through anecdotal feedback. Whenever we have a community member approach us at an event or public meeting and say, “Wow, I saw on Facebook that you....” or reference a staff member we featured, we know we’ve made a connection that counts.

At a recent public meeting, a citizen who has been a very vocal opponent of the port’s controversial energy project approached External Affairs staff to say that he has been impressed by our social media content and has put us on “See first” in Facebook. We’ve observed him sharing our content, from news on our waterfront redevelopment to strategic planning and public events.