

**AAPA 2018 COMMUNICATIONS AWARDS**

**Port of Palm Beach**

***Website Welcomed***

**Entry Classification: Websites**

In March of 2018, the Port of Palm Beach District hired a new public relations and media specialist with extensive experience in managing and designing websites. As part of the Port’s multi-year service contract with its website provider, a website redesign was included. In April 2018, the specialist and the website provider commenced the website redesign project, requiring a 5-phase timeline over a 7-month period, as required by the website provider. On December 7, 2017, the Port of Palm Beach welcomed its new website to the internet: [www.PortofPalmBeach.com](http://www.PortofPalmBeach.com).

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

The Port’s website looked outdated by 2017 standards. The overuse of capitalized words, serif fonts, and small point sizes made the website uninviting and difficult to read. The home page had too many subordinate elements which lacked a hierarchy of information and navigation. Featured news did not have accompanying images. A sidebar with 10 links added to the cluttered home page. The footer did not enhance navigation. And the photos in the rotating slide show on the home page were not particularly appealing or eye-catching.

With the addition of a public relations and media specialist to the staff, the Port had the opportunity to assign the website redesign project to that new staff member, given the specialist’s experience and knowledge in launching and developing websites.

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

The Port’s website complements its mission by accomplishing the goals of increasing the frequency and quality of communications with the citizens within its District and establishing a more open dialogue and transparency between Port Staff and the community at large.

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

The goals of the website redesign project were to have a new website that elevated and enhanced the Port’s image, to create a more inviting and user-friendly site, and to devise a site that more easily and readily communicated Port messaging.

To reach the goal of launching a new site, the specialist needed to plan a photo shoot, analyze the current site map and navigation, become familiar with the site’s pages and usage, and poll fellow staff on their usage of the website, prior to the project kickoff meeting on May 11, 2017. In terms of measurable milestones, they are itemized under #4 below. All of those deadlines were adhered to, in order ensure a timely site launch in December 2017.

The website’s primary audiences are customers such as current and prospective tenants, license holders and users; residents in the District; past, current and prospective cruise ship passengers; and the South Florida community. The website’s secondary audiences are Port staff and Commissioners.

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

The strategies and tactics developed to achieve success were:

* Home page layout – create a more inviting and eye-catching home page layout which will enhance the perception of the Port
  + Using the analytics dashboard, determine which pages were visited most often on the site.
  + Determine all the content for the home page, prioritizing and shaping them, using modernized layout icons and elements
* Photography – refresh the image of the Port using professional photography
  + Book and execute a photo shoot with a local photographer specializing in aerials, sunset and sunrise shots
* Interior pages – enhance the layout so that users can more easily navigate to other sections and pages on the site
  + Redesign the footer and add graphic buttons just above the footer

In order to launch the site on time, the following timeline was required by the website provider:

1. May 11, 2017 – project kickoff meeting
2. May 31, 2017 – photo shoot
3. June 9, 2017 – photos and project forms due
4. June 19, 2017 – design discovery and content preparation meeting
5. July 5, 2017 – greyscale layout and color proposal
6. July 21, 2017 – revisions to layout and colors completed
7. August 9, 2017 – layout approval, color approval, and content preparations due
8. August 22, 2017 – design presentation meeting
9. September 8 & 22, 2017 – design revisions completed
10. October 6, 2017 – design approval due
11. November 3, 2017 – production website completed
12. November 9, 2017 – website review meeting
13. November 17, 2017 – group virtual training session
14. December 7, 2017 – website launch

Internally, the staff assigned to the project was the public relations and media specialist. Externally, the website provider assigned a project manager, art director, and various content managers and graphic designers.

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

The new website design is informed by a rich palette of colors: vibrant red, deep navy and cool grey. The home page is modern, simple, clean, and uncluttered. Legibility was enhanced through use of sans serif fonts and color blocking. To foster engagement and connect with the audience on a social level, icons with links to Facebook, Twitter and Instagram were moved from the footer to the very top of the home page adjacent to the search bar.

The home page is more robust and has more content, yet it is presented in an easy to navigate fashion. Larger graphic buttons lead to popular sections, the agenda center and cruise vacations, while also fostering engagement through sign-ups for email alerts. For those who don’t have an account on Instagram, they can still enjoy all the content in the home page Instagram feed, without logging in.

Featured news is more prominently displayed with accompanying imagery and a “view all” button to see more news. The footer offers ease of navigation with more links than before. Photography throughout the site is colorful and eye-catching.

Comparing the three months prior to the new website launch with the 3-month period after the site debuted, the increase in key metrics was substantial. These numbers suggest that the site’s usability and utilization increased considerably after the new site was launched on December 7, 2017.

Category Sep. to Nov. 2017 Jan. to Mar. 2018 Variance

Visits 26,610 42,553 15,943

Pageviews 58,403 83,646 25,243

Unique Pageviews 44,041 66,331 22,290

Unique Downloads 12,616 23,895 11,279

When comparing the same time period, first quarter, year over year, the increases are less substantial, but still showed higher utilization rates in visits and unique downloads.

Category Jan. to Mar. 2017 Jan. to Mar. 2018 Variance

Visits 37,121 42,553 5,432

Pageviews 93,077 83,646 -9,431

Unique Pageviews 70,474 66,331 -4,143

Unique Downloads 19,877 23,895 4,018