

**Port Tampa Bay – Open for Business**  
**Overall Campaign Category**  
**AAPA Communication Awards**

**Entry Description:**

On March 13, 2020, Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) announced a voluntarily suspension of cruise sailings for 30 days. Following the announcement, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued their own no-sail order which extended a suspension in cruise business. Port Tampa Bay received several media inquiries about the status of the port's operations, financial impact and the possibility of layoffs due to the cruise suspension. Despite the suspension of cruise business, Port Tampa Bay remained open and operational as a Department of Homeland Security designated essential business. Additionally, the port's diversification helped to lessen the financial burden of a loss of cruise business. Further, the port was entering its slow season for cruising, which also helped lessen the impact of the crisis. The port embarked on a multi-platform communications plan to ensure our community and region understood the importance of Port Tampa Bay's continued operations. This mission also assisted our port in advocacy efforts, including economic relief funding from government agencies.

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

Similar to ports across the nation, most lay people do not understand the impact a seaport has on their daily lives. Port Tampa Bay needs to remind tenants, partners, members of the media and the community that the Port remains open for business and a critical part of the region's infrastructure and supply chain, even as cruise business has been suspended temporarily due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Port Tampa Bay's unique diversification allowed us an opportunity to showcase the many ways we affect our community, even with a cruise sailing suspension.

**2. How does the communication used in this entry map back to the organization's overall mission?**

Port Tampa Bay is by far Florida's largest port, handling over 37 million tons of cargo per year. We are also Florida's largest port in terms of physical size (and one of the largest in the country) encompassing over 5,000 acres. We are West Central Florida's largest single economic driver in the region.

Perhaps even more important than our size is the diversity of our portfolio. Port Tampa Bay is the most diversified port in Florida (and one of the most diversified in the nation) handling ALL major cargo categories. Additionally, Tampa is home to several globally successful exporters,

such as the Mosaic Company (a phosphate fertilizer supplier), Amalie Oil (manufacturer of specialty engine oils exporting to over 100 countries), and Tampa Tank/Florida Structural Steel (manufacturer of bridges, petroleum storage tanks and specialized steel structures with a focus on Latin American exports, as well as domestic markets).

With a huge local market in excess of 8 million people and welcoming over 60 million tourists/visitors per year, the Tampa Bay/Orlando I-4 Corridor region is a huge local market and the fastest growing region of the state. The I-4 corridor is home to the largest concentration of distribution centers in Florida as companies seek to minimize time and their inland delivery cost of serving the entire state. Florida is the leading state for merchandise exports to Latin America and the Caribbean (responsible for 36% of all US exports to the region). Port Tampa Bay is the closest full service US port to the expanded Panama Canal, and is strategically positioned for emerging opportunities in Cuba (formerly Port Tampa Bay's largest trading partner).

Port Tampa Bay needs to remind tenants, partners, members of the media and the community that the Port remains open for business and a critical part of the region's infrastructure and supply chain, even as cruise business has been suspended temporarily due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Knowing our stakeholders seek information about our port through different channels (social media, web traffic, email, governmental/community groups, traditional media, etc.), we sought to communicate regularly across a variety of platforms.

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

The goals of Port Tampa Bay's communication plan include:

- Provide regular communication to key stakeholders, informing them of measures the port has taken to keep our entire maritime community safe, open, and operational.
- Inform the public of the port's role in supporting the local economy, as well as the infrastructure needs of the region.
- Instill confidence in our business partners in the port's ability to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and successfully weather the impact of it.
- Work with the Port's Business Development and Real Estate Offices to ensure the port's tenants and customers receive routine communication about the status of our operations.
- Coordinate with local emergency response agencies and update communication plan to reflect trends in public health and safety and communicate valuable information to our maritime community.

The primary audience includes current port tenants, our business customers and operators, partnering agencies and the community we serve.

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

**Strategies:** Continue to keep our target audiences updated through daily informative social media posts and videos, media relations outreach to inform the media on port business, and weekly web updates on the business and port partners.

Port Tampa Bay’s communications team took part in weekly calls with Hillsborough County’s Emergency Management Group, Joint Information Center, and the Public Relations Society of America’s Senior Communications Tampa Roundtable to gather insights and best practices for responding to the crisis on a variety of platforms.

Tactics	Audiences	Communication Samples
<p>Create weekly communication to be featured prominently on Port Tampa Bay’s website. Communication will also be shared with all Port Tampa Bay tenants, business partners, organizational partners, professional organizations and government agencies/representatives.</p>	<p>Tenants, customers, business partners, government organizations, professional organizations, laypeople.</p>	<p><b>Latest update can be viewed here:</b></p> <p><a href="https://www.porttb.com/posts?id=B767D1B7-2E36-429F-AADE-16E3A30D12C5">https://www.porttb.com/posts?id=B767D1B7-2E36-429F-AADE-16E3A30D12C5</a></p>
<p>Create information hub for media and current/potential passengers featuring updated information from cruise lines, as well as information from Cruise Lines International Association and outlining Port Tampa Bay’s safety procedures and protocols.</p>	<p>Current cruise passengers, future cruise passengers, media, laypeople.</p>	<p><b>Website:</b></p> <p><a href="http://www.porttb.com/cruisesafety">www.porttb.com/cruisesafety</a></p>

<p>Launch a social media campaign, featuring daily updates on the port’s cargo operations, with an emphasis on our diverse lines of business.</p>	<p>Tenants, customers, business partners, government organizations, professional organizations, laypeople.</p>	<p><b>Links to Social Media:</b></p> <p><a href="#">Facebook</a></p> <p><a href="#">Twitter</a></p> <p><a href="#">Instagram</a></p> <p><a href="#">LinkedIn</a></p>
<p>Proactively communicate with members of the media via press releases and pitching relevant and timely stories.</p>	<p>Traditional news media (local, state, national outlets)</p>	<p><b>Example:</b></p> <p><a href="#">Port Tampa Bay’s diversification is ‘helping us through this pandemic’</a></p>
<p>Produce several videos, featuring Port Tampa Bay’s diversity and relaying and reinforcing “Open for Business” messaging.</p>	<p>Tenants, customers, business partners, government organizations, professional organizations, laypeople.</p>	<p><b>Here are several examples:</b></p> <p><a href="#">Cranes</a></p> <p><a href="#">Sulfur</a></p> <p><a href="#">Steel</a></p> <p><a href="#">Container</a></p> <p><a href="#">Distribution Centers</a></p> <p><a href="#">Trucking</a></p>

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

Our goal in regularly communicating with key stakeholders was to provide information on the port's safety efforts, as well as ensure there was public confidence in the port's ability to maintain its support of the more than 85,000 direct and indirect jobs impacted by our operations and the more than \$17 billion dollar impact we have on our region.

Since March 13 (the date cruise sailings were suspended), Port Tampa Bay has:

- Increased our social media following by several hundred people, while also increasing engagement.
- Increased web traffic to our homepage to more than 82,000 visits, including more than 65,000 unique visits.
  - Our Cruise Safety page, created in direct response to the COVID-19 pandemic accounted for nearly 7% of all visits to our website during this time.
- Generated positive news mentions, while minimizing negative press coverage, including:
  - *Tampa Bay Times* - [Port Tampa Bay's diversification is 'helping us through this pandemic'](#)
  - *Fox 13* - [Feeding Tampa Bay turns hunger to hope for hundreds of Bay area families](#)
  - *EIN Presswire* - [Port Tampa & CURA Freight Send Message of Reassurance to Tampa Bay Community](#)
  - *Public Relations Society of America* - [Celebrating Earth Day with PRSATB Stories of Sustainability](#)