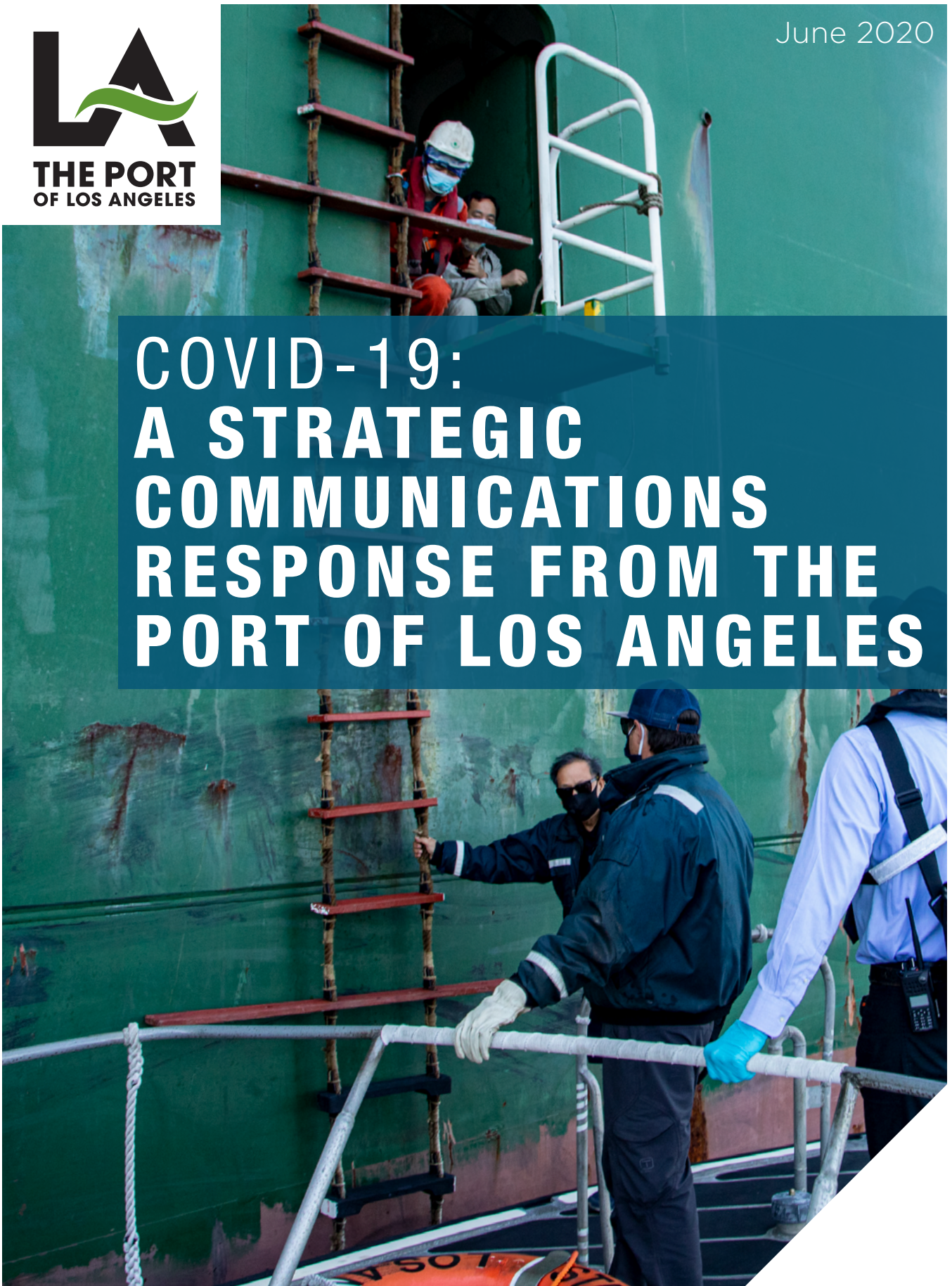




June 2020

COVID-19: A STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS RESPONSE FROM THE PORT OF LOS ANGELES



COVID-19: A STRATEGIC RESPONSE



As the COVID-19 public health crisis made its way around the globe in early 2020, eventually reaching the United States with full force in March, Port of Los Angeles leaders early on identified a strategic communications objective: Lead the maritime-logistics COVID-19 narrative with a transparent, information-driven multimedia communications plan. The primary initial objective was to quickly -- and repeatedly -- reassure our stakeholders that the Port of Los Angeles was open, functioning at near-normal levels and fully able to move essential cargo through the nation's busiest port.

As crisis communication efforts turned from days to weeks, then months, the Port's Media Relations team capitalized on early successes (virtual press conferences, video messaging, remote media interviews and social media outreach) to reach more stakeholders in a three-month period than it ever has. Between March 1 and May 31, Cision, a leading independent media monitoring company, [calculated the publicity value](#) gained during that period at \$9.1 million. That is more than double any previous three-month period. Concurrently, our social media audience grew by 15 percent compared to the previous year in the three-month period.

This effort, however, was more important than just publicity value. It was about reassuring and informing

a diverse group of stakeholders that the Port and its partners were working through this crisis to provide not only cargo but medical assistance, supplies and critical personal protective equipment. From our employees in San Pedro to our global partners in Shenzhen, the Media Relations team developed strategic and custom objectives and messaging for a wide range of stakeholders.



COVID-19 created an unparalleled communications challenge. With a watchful eye on our own health and safety, the Port's Media team, with no outsourcing for any aspect of the project, created and executed a strategic communications plan for COVID-19 that has exceeded our expectations. The group utilized the global logistics expertise and media savvy of Port of Los Angeles Executive Director Gene Seroka, providing him with local, regional, national and international forums to broaden his reputation as an industry thought leader. We unleashed new media technology and platforms. We borrowed vacant offices from those working from home and converted them to [multimedia studios](#). We devised a way to succeed in challenging circumstances.

For your consideration, we are pleased to offer "COVID-19: A Strategic Communications Response from the Port of Los Angeles."



CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

THE LEAD-UP

Throughout 2019 and early 2020, the Port's media team was already fully engaged in high-profile outreach due to the ongoing effects of the trade war. The Port's Executive Director and Media Relations Director went to Washington, D.C. in November 2019 to release a study on the negative impact of the trade war. [The report and accompanying news media outreach created significant national media attention.](#) In February of 2020, just before the full impact of COVID-19 was known in the United States, the Port's Executive Director and Media Relations Director traveled to New York to meet with a [wide range of national media](#) about the negative effect

that the trade war was having on jobs, trade and the U.S. economy. Those high-profile media contacts turned out to be valuable when the Port implemented its COVID-19 communications plan a few weeks later.



THE FACTORS

In the first week of March, it began to become clear that COVID-19 was going to be much more than a far-away issue in Asia and Europe. By the second week of March, when stay-at-home orders began taking hold across the country, the Port of Los Angeles moved into crisis mode.

Executives began daily 9 a.m. leadership meetings that continue to this day. The Senior Director of Communications as well as the Media Relations Director are part of the meetings and decision-making process. It was clear from the outset that **our primary objective was to communicate as clearly, often and with as broad a reach as possible that the Port of Los Angeles was not only fully functional, but doing critical supply chain work to assist our nation during a crisis.**

The communications team needed to create a crisis communication strategy that prioritized delivering fast, accurate, transparent information to stakeholders. Port stakeholders are a large and diverse group, including tenants and business partners (terminal operators, railroads, etc.), cargo owners, shipping lines, community groups, international clients, labor, employees, policy makers and others.

Additionally, on March 31, the Port of Los Angeles Executive Director was assigned by Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti to stand up the City of LA's official logistical response effort to COVID-19 - [Logistics Victory Los Angeles \(LoVLA\)](#). LoVLA's mission is to get critical supplies to frontline medical service providers by optimizing the supply chain, processing donations, and working to build a city stockpile. This effort quickly folded into the Port of LA crisis response. Promoting engagement with LoVLA became a cornerstone of the Port's COVID-19 communications strategy.



Also needed, was a way to communicate quickly and effectively to diverse stakeholder groups. Traditional press conferences, in-person meetings and gatherings disappeared in a matter of days. On the maritime communications front, we had yet to see the use of Zoom or other emerging technologies to engage media or other large groups to convey key messaging. The Port media team moved quickly to devise and implement a wide-ranging communications effort to get our message heard.



*NOTE: Links to each component of this entry can be found on the [Directory Page](#)

THE MISSION

We deliver value to our customers by providing superior infrastructure and promoting efficient operations that maintain our essential role in the nation's economy and transportation network as North America's preferred gateway and a catalyst for job growth.

Port of Los Angeles Strategic Plan Mission Statement

The Port views its role as the nation's busiest container port as a responsibility to also take a leading role with respect to domestic and global maritime logistics issues. Whether it is a trade war, pandemic or the need for digital technology, our objective is to be at the forefront of the conversation, helping to shape policy whenever possible.

Our vision: "We are America's Port® - the nation's #1 container port and the global model for security, sustainability and social responsibility."

The Port has 12 initiatives in its current 2018-2022 Strategic Plan. Included in those initiatives is this: "Strong Relationship with Stakeholders: Promote stakeholder awareness and engagement with the Port."

The COVID-19 crisis is a striking example of how the Port of Los Angeles has created stakeholder awareness and engagement.

PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING

The global scale of COVID-19 and its ripple effects required the Port of Los Angeles to engage every function of the in-house communications team. No outsourcing of work was used in any aspect of this strategy.

OBJECTIVES

- *Communicate clearly and repeatedly, with as much reach as possible, that during COVID-19, the Port of Los Angeles is fully operational, engaging in critical supply chain work to assist our nation during a crisis.*
- *Maintain and strengthen stakeholder engagement through a global crisis.*
- *Expand the global reach of Port of L.A.'s visibility.*
- *Support the LoVLA effort to obtain medical supply equipment and match supplies with those in need.*
- *Further establish the Port's Executive Director as a global thought leader on maritime logistics.*
- *Increase the Port of L.A.'s social media impact across multiple platforms.*

AUDIENCES

For this effort, our audiences are wide-ranging and diverse. They are also each critical in their own way, thus no need to distinguish between primary and secondary audiences.

Audiences: Tenants, business stakeholders (beneficial cargo owners, shipping lines, terminal operators, shipping lines, etc.), labor groups, policy makers, media (general and trades), policy makers, international stakeholders, employees, community groups and the public.

TIMELINE AND TOOLS

December 2019 thru May 2020

DECEMBER

COVID-19 begins to impact trade out of Asia

JANUARY

COVID-19 impact folds into Port of LA communications

FEBRUARY

Port of LA communications focus shifts to COVID-19 as it is deemed a pandemic

COVID-19 info page launches on portofla.org

MARCH

Weekly employee and public video updates begin

Coverage begins on order of USNS Mercy Hospital Ship to Port of Los Angeles to offset COVID-19 hospital impact

March 27 – USNS Mercy Hospital Ship arrives

Daily cargo updates begin on Twitter/LinkedIn

Monthly publicity value: **\$1.6M**

APRIL

LoVLA website launches

Coverage of first large scale donations to LoVLA

Average of 120 news stories per week across print, radio, television

Monthly publicity value: **\$2.3M**

MAY

Continued coverage of LoVLA

Continued weekly update videos

Continued daily cargo updates

Monthly publicity value: **\$5.2M**



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COMPONENTS

Communication strategies centered on being a constant, reliable source of up-to-date information. The Port's media team instituted the use of Zoom and live-TV media feeds starting in March. Social media and websites were updated multiple times daily, so that stakeholders had a consistently updated snapshot of day-to-day operations at the Port of LA. Key media strategy components included:

- *Use of Zoom, live TV feeds and other technology for virtual press conferences, live and recorded TV interviews.*
- *Video updates sent via press release to key external stakeholders.*
- *Video updates to employees (many working from home).*
- *Multiple daily updates to websites with photos, videos, including daily "cargo updates."*
- *Multiple daily postings on suite of Port of Los Angeles social media outlets.*
- *Use of key media contacts to arrange dozens of interviews with Executive Director Gene Seroka.*

PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING

VIRTUAL, DIGITAL

Using tools like Zoom to facilitate press conferences, web conferences, and strategy meetings, the Port of LA COVID-19 communications response went virtual and digital. This became a necessity in mid-March as it became clear all of our stakeholders, including media, were adapting to virtual meetings and events. Strategies included:

- **Video conferencing and webinar platforms** to facilitate virtual press conferences, on-camera interviews and updates for segmented stakeholders. The Port's first virtual press conference was held on March 26. In addition to Zoom, the media team reached out to local TV stations for this event. A pool feed was set up and the news conference was available live to television stations across Southern California. Most TV stations broadcast the news conference live on their social media feed. Between ABC, KTLA and FOX, more than 190,000 viewers tuned in online for the live press conference. We've since had three additional virtual press conferences.
- Weekly **internal employee update videos** to address health and safety concerns and provide business updates to employees.
- Weekly **public update videos** to provide trade and logistics updates to stakeholders and business partners.
- **Social media** platforms to publicly share news, updates, and information about COVID-19's impact on port operations.
- **Aggregating and prominently displaying** all aspects of COVID-19 response on the **Port website**.
- Using Port's wide **media database** and developed media relationships to secure interviews and features with international, national, regional and local media.
- Use of traditional **news releases**, with links to video and other multimedia.

“

“I have been watching all your feeds and appreciate how the Port has kept us informed of activities and plans in these uncertain times.”

”

Ron Kilgore
KNX Radio

PRIORITIZING

The COVID-19 crisis communication strategy balanced a multitude of information touchstones that needed to be consistently and comprehensively addressed, such as:

- *Trade and business updates.*
- *Logistics and safety measure rollouts.*
- *Community outreach and resource information.*

Each weekly video update included each of these elements. Individual social media posts were scheduled on a regular basis and breaking information was shared as accurately and efficiently as possible.

ENGAGEMENT

Due to our news conferences and outreach, there was an unprecedented influx of media inquiries and requests for interviews with the Executive Director of the Port of Los Angeles. Media outlets sought to expound upon the information and updates being released via the Port of LA communications campaign. During the three-month period of March 1 through May 30, the Port handled 1,017 media inquiries, more than triple the amount of a normal three-month period.

Regular Accountability Checks

The Communications team provided daily updates on cargo volumes on Twitter and LinkedIn to provide easy access to information often asked about in interviews and public inquiries. Sharing the data promoted transparency and served as a database for port-related COVID-19 information.

Home on the Web

A dedicated [COVID-19 webpage](#) was launched on the Port of LA Website in February to provide a central hub for all communication and engagement. Visitors to the page can find:

- *Daily updates on cargo volumes, vessels, gate hours and void sailings.*
- *Links to public update videos.*
- *Television and radio interviews.*
- *Press releases.*
- *LoVLA information and a link to the LoVLA website.*
- *Answers to FAQs.*
- *Social media links and updates.*

[Twitter.com/PortofLA](https://twitter.com/PortofLA)



PortofLosAngeles.org/covid-19



RESULTS

METRICS

Cision, Inc. is the independent media monitoring company the Port of Los Angeles utilizes to track metrics. Cision captured all COVID-related print and broadcast media from March 1 through May 31 of 2020. The data shows, with links to each, that there were 1,643 articles and broadcasts during that period. The publicity value of that media equals \$9.1 million. For comparison, during the same period of 2019, the total was \$5.3 million for all topics related to the Port.

Social Media Impact

In March, April, and May, the top posts across Port of Los Angeles (@PortofLA) brand accounts on social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and LinkedIn) were all in response to COVID-19. All social media accounts saw an increase in engagement in comparison to the previous year.

At the outset of COVID-19 in **March 2020**, the Port's social media audience totaled 99,921 followers—a 15.4% increase compared to March 2019—exceeding the Port's set goal of an annual 10% increase in followers. Twitter mentions alone during this period increased 1,021% since the prior month. This increased activity is largely attributed to the arrival of the USNS Mercy, which was the [Top Tweet](#) for the month, earning 80.8K impressions.

At the height of COVID-19 in **April 2020**, the Port's social media audience increased 15.4% since April 2019 with 100,765 followers. April's [top Facebook post](#), reached 21K, spotlighted Port restaurant tenant San Pedro Fish Market and Restaurant, which served more than 600 seafood meals to thank first responders.

The Port has maintained that audience throughout the pandemic, reporting 102,222 followers in **May 2020**, a 15.7% increase since May 2019. May's [Top Tweet](#) earned 12K impressions, thanking shipping line and Port customer CMA CGM for their generous donation of 200,000 masks to LoVLA.

Approach to Social Media During COVID-19

Information is presented throughout the day in easy-to-understand language.

Addressing Rumors:

When stay-at-home orders were first issued, rumors circulated that the Port was closed. The Port quickly and repeatedly utilized social media to correct any false statements about the Port being closed, including replying to users directly.

Video messaging:

From March through May, the Port released 10 external videos, including a video news briefing, featuring updates from Port of Los Angeles Executive Director Gene Seroka, which received a total of 88,586 views (in addition to 190,000 online TV viewers) during this three-month period.

Posting of daily cargo update

Beginning in mid-March, the Port began posting daily cargo updates on Twitter and LinkedIn, which indicate the status of terminal operations, as well as how many and what type of ships are in port for the day. On weekday mornings, posts are presented with a cargo update graphic that links back to the dedicated COVID-19 page on the Port's website. These daily posts generally receive engagement from followers.

Shared content:

In an effort to boost awareness, we utilized Twitter as the primary platform to share information from other brands, including sharing official tweets from the military and government agencies including the CDC, Governor Gavin Newsom, Mayor Eric Garcetti, County of Los Angeles, City of Los Angeles, shipping lines, customers, advocacy groups and more.

<https://twitter.com/PortofLA/status/1242512962968932352>

The Port also prominently indicated on the website homepage that Port terminals were open for business.

Updated information on social media:

The Port of Los Angeles, the nation's busiest container port, remains open and operational amid the COVID-19 pandemic. #AmericasPort

Web Traffic

In response to the growing number of inquiries about COVID-19, in February 2020, the Port's media team created an informational page [Port of Los Angeles Information on Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#), which has received nearly 10,000 unique page views to date. Apart from the homepage, it is the third top-viewed page on the Port's website, after business and container statistics. This curated page contains vessel and gate information, FAQs, videos, news releases, relevant media clips and videos—all related to COVID-19. Instead of searching for COVID topics, this one-stop-shop offers updated information about any impacts of the coronavirus on the Port. Two staff members update this page daily.



ANECDOTAL

As COVID-19 continues, the Port of L.A.'s COVID-19 communication response will continue. The implementation of this campaign has provided a model for providing reaching our stakeholders during an extended public health crisis.



“

“I have been watching all your feeds and appreciate how the Port has kept us informed of activities and plans in these uncertain times.”

”

Ron Kilgore
KNX Radio

“

An incredible communications team. The Port's work was more than we could have ever hoped from a content and quality standpoint. We could not have asked for a better partner.

”

Amber Leonard

Director of Corporate Communications, Americas | CMA-CGM



“

I listened to Gene Seroka's presentation today and realized how busy the Port is with media. Thank you for helping to get needed supplies and PPE to first responders. Getting media attention is so important to success.

”

Michelle Grubbs

Vice President, Pacific Merchant Shipping Association



Directory of Entry Links

The following link is a directory of resources and components used in the Port of Los Angeles' response to COVID-19 and referenced throughout this document:

www.portoflosangeles.org/aapa

COMMONLY SEARCHED TOPICS

THE PORT OF LOS ANGELES

DIRECTORY

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PORT OF LOS ANGELES COVID-19 VIDEO CONFERENCES

LOGISTICS VICTORY