AAPA Communications Awards 2020 Submission:

Port of Redwood City Website Modernization

Category 1 | Classification 14

PORT OF REDWOOD CITY

AAPA Communication Awards 2020

Submission: Port of Redwood City | Website Modernization

Port Category 1 | Entry Classification 14: Websites
redwoodcityport.com

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With an ambitious new vision for the future, coupled with a distinct desire to be a more transparent organization, the Port of Redwood City embarked on a comprehensive website modernization project in 2018 that completely overhauled their "front door" to the world.

Ideally located on the Redwood Creek Channel in South San Francisco Bay, the specialty port was ready to take its profile to the next level by increasing its cargo tonnage, modernizing its terminal operations, diversifying its tenant portfolio and reinvesting in waterfront amenities. To accomplish this, the Port needed a digital presence that aligned with these aspirations and clearly communicated the Port's vision.

The website modernization project aimed to accomplish three significant goals: (1) improve organizational transparency, which had historically been lacking; (2) elevate the Port's profile on the global stage to help facilitate the activation of its newly adopted 2020 Vision; and (3) advance UI and UX to lead to a more functional and modern website.

Over a six-month period, the Port of Redwood City did just that by completely revamping its website with a crisp new design, user-friendly navigation structure, refreshed content, SEO optimization and online functionality.

Today, the site is a much better reflection of the Port's role as a global trade partner and is helping to amplify the Port's work in the community, with the environment, as a dedicated FEMA disaster support site, and among the international cargo shipping industry. Most importantly, the new website gives the Port of Redwood City the credibility and positioning it deserves to advance its 25-year vision for the future.

And recent web analytics support the notion that the project has been a success. Traffic alone has increased more than 23% and almost half of new traffic has been generated by SEO efforts. Furthermore, the Port's social media channels have also enjoyed more traffic given the integration and promotion of the Port's channels on the new website – all supporting the Port's project goals of improving transparency and elevating its image.

1. THE CHALLENGE

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

The challenges of a complete overhaul were significant and pressed the envelope of the status quo from the beginning. As an agency that had "flown under the radar" for years, the time had come to open the doors of the agency to the public as well as broadcast to the world the benefits of this specialty port.

If the agency was going to accomplish its ambitious plans outlined in its vision for the future, it needed a 21st century website to match its aspirations.

In addition to these high-level concerns, the Port was also faced with the tactical challenge of not having a dedicated marketing/communications team in-house. Instead, the Port relied on the City of Redwood City's communication team via a contractual arrangement. While the Port is an autonomous department of the City, the City's communications team was still "once removed," so to speak, making it more challenging to get such a mammoth project off the ground.

Furthermore, the City's communications team did not have a web programmer on staff, so an out-of-the-box solution would have to be sourced to make the project happen.

With the goals in mind of improving transparency, elevating the Port's profile and advancing UI and UX experience, the website team set out to reimagine the Port's website.

The existing site had become an unorganized mélange of information that had been haphazardly posted over the last decade. There were a dozen different drop-down menus and several sub-menu items, and there was certainly not a strategic communications presence on the site.

The old site also lacked any marketing gloss, and simply looked like an outdated, abandoned government site. It was about as far off from the Port's new vision as a site could be.

To bring the site into alignment with the Port's future direction, the information on the site would need to be audited, organized, catalogued and rewritten in a fresh voice that was more reflective of today's Port.

Coincidently, the Port had recently adopted a refreshed visual brand look and feel, which also had not been showcased on the website. This was a perfect opportunity to unveil the new branding along with a newly organized website that put the Port in a positive light and positioned it to move towards its ambitious goal of become *the* shipping hub for the Silicon Valley, as well as a trusted and revered public asset in the Bay Area.

2. THE ALIGNMENT

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

The Port of Redwood City's vision is to maximize land use, improve infrastructure, diversify maritime and commercial business efforts, improve operations, and protect the environment – all with the overall goal of strengthening the Port's impact to the region's economy and quality of life.

The previous website did not support these efforts because the current land uses were unclear, the infrastructure was difficult to locate, potential business partners could not easily navigate to the information they needed. Furthermore, there were few ways for the community to easily find and understand the local impact the Port had on the economy and quality of life when it came to job creation, contributions to local industry, public access to the waterfront, and recreational amenities.

The new site development and ongoing messaging and design are all designed to highlight the Port's contributions to the community, while at the same time promoting business and recreational opportunities.

3. THE PLAN

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

The development and ongoing improvements to the site are all centered around achieving three primary goals:

1) Improve organizational transparency, which had historically been lacking;
2) Elevate the Port's profile on the global stage to help facilitate the activation of its newly adopted 2020 Vision;
3) Advance UI and UX to lead to a more functional and modern website.

With these objectives in mind, the project team embarked upon a five-phase initiative to launch and continually improve the new site. Each of these phases is detailed below in the execution section.

- Phase 1 – Discovery
- Phase 2 – Design
- Phase 3 – Content Curation & Migration
- Phase 4 – Testing & Troubleshooting
- Phase 5 – Launch & Ongoing Improvement

The website's new primary audience is business partners including current and potential tenants for both maritime and waterfront recreation leasing, as well as shipping brokers for the import and export of cargo and regional partners in the provision of emergency preparedness services to the region.

Additionally, a secondary audience is visitors and local community residents and organizations, who should have both the opportunity to take advantage of waterfront amenities and an understanding of the Port's regional economic impact and natural resource protection, all of which are unique benefits to Port cities.

The tertiary audience is the global stage. With the Port's ambitious plans to become *the* shipping hub for the Silicon Valley, as well as a trusted and revered asset in the Bay Area, this audience had to be considered in all aspects of the modernization process.

4. THE EXECUTION:

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

The initial development and design process was completed in a six-month period beginning in June 2018 and concluding with the launch in December 2018. Since then, ongoing improvements have been implemented with a goal of continuous posting of dynamic content.

Each of the phases in the project had a series of strategies (in bold below) and tactics (included in each bullet) that the project team executed in order to implement the new website.

Phase 1 - Discovery:

- **Audit the old website** – a thorough inventory of the old site was needed to begin the process of understanding all of the information that needed to be on the new site. This included categorizing data into outdated and updated content in order to develop a new site structure that would include only current and relevant material.
- **Understand direction from leadership** – interviews with executive leadership and board of port commissioners helped the project team understand the aspiration the Port had for the new site.
- **Collaborate with stakeholders** – focus groups and working sessions with both leadership and staff helped the team understand the content and develop strategies for how best to organize and present information on the new site.
- **Analyze the data** – A review of the site's data patterns including variations in traffic on a seasonal basis, areas of the site with the most and least traffic and mapping of the visitor navigation to help understand the path site users took to navigate to the data they need.

Phase 2 - Design:

- **Select the right platform** – The new site needed to be simple to design and maintain for any user, so the team selected Wix as the platform due to its options of being customizable for design purposes, while maintaining a simple back-end content management system.

- **Develop a new site infrastructure and navigation** – The first part of design began with an outline of pages needed for a future site map, and major decisions on the navigation menu, which was simplified from 12 options to five to improve navigation.
- **Enhance the user experience** – The project team then went about selecting data presentation options, add-ons and functionality to improve the user experience. These included slide shows, online forms, video integration, hover menus, accordions and other widgets to improve the user interface.
- **Design in alignment with the brand** – Finally, the actual design including graphic elements, color selection and on-screen organization was developed to showcase the Port's brand in a modern way. The design included development of a unique iconography as a signature element for the brand.

Phase 3 - Content curation and migration:

- **Copywrite new content** – The new site was almost completely rewritten, with only very specific subsets of information migrated from the old site. This required a great deal of content development, particularly with the goal of aligning to and achieving the goals set out for the project.
- **Update and archive documents** – A great deal of the port's information was presented in posted documents in PDF format. Those needed to be migrated into on-site content or redeveloped in both writing and design in order to align with the new design of the site and the goals of the new site.
- **Develop photography** – The Port's old website did not contain many images and so an entirely new set of photos needed to be curated to present on the site that helped tell the Port story and illustrate the amenities of the waterfront.
- **Add video** – New videos were developed and presented on the site to explain the Port's services and promote signature events such as PortFest.
- **Maintain archives** – A good deal of data needed to be curated and presented on the site in order to maintain an easily accessible public archive of public documents, including newsletters, meeting agendas and minutes and press releases.

Phase 4 – Testing and troubleshooting:

- **Test site before launch** – A select group of internal and external users helped go through each page of the site to test links, practice the navigation, develop pathways and ensure all site pages were active and viable for public use.
- **Improve pathways based on test user interaction** – Any areas of the site that were not intuitive for the test users were improved by adding in icons, additional links, calls-to-action and menu drop-downs.

Phase 5 – Launch and ongoing improvements:

- **Launch the new site** – The site was launched in December of 2018 and announced with a press release, newsletter article and social media posts to invite the public to visit the new site.
- **Develop new content** – In order to continuously improve the user experience and ensure the website stays current, the team employs a variety of tactics to maintain the site including new photography,

updating with press releases and articles, adding both on-site content and downloadable PDFs for everything from fact sheets to activity sheets, and developing promotional campaigns and outreach materials that utilize the website for their call-to-action to increase traffic to desired areas of the site.

- **Implement SEO practices** – Additionally, the team has worked on back-end modifications to the site to optimize search engine results, comparing keyword search terms to utilize the highest performing words, adding meta-descriptions to every page, ensuring every image has alt descriptions and utilizing google indexing and analytics best practices to continuously optimize the site.

5. THE RESULTS:

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

The Port of Redwood City's new website has received dozens of accolades from partners, tenants, and stakeholders who all appreciated the modern interface, easy access to information and new focus on community benefits.

The site now nicely aligns with the Port's goals and vision for the future and helps enhance transparency with data and information on a variety of topics relevant to the community, to current business partners and to potential future businesses.

The most recent website analytics show an overall increase of 23% in site traffic, with 41% coming from search engines, which validates the team's SEO efforts. Additionally, the latest analytics show 70% of site visitors are viewing on desktop, and 30% are viewing from mobile devices and tablets. While lower than the national ration for all sites, this does show the importance of mobile optimization.

Furthermore, the website is now utilized as a primary resource for call-to-actions. We are able to develop topic-specific outreach materials, then direct people to the website to learn more using user-friendly URLs.

Overall, the Port of Redwood City's new website helps us speak to our audiences and tell the Port story in a visual, interactive and compelling way.
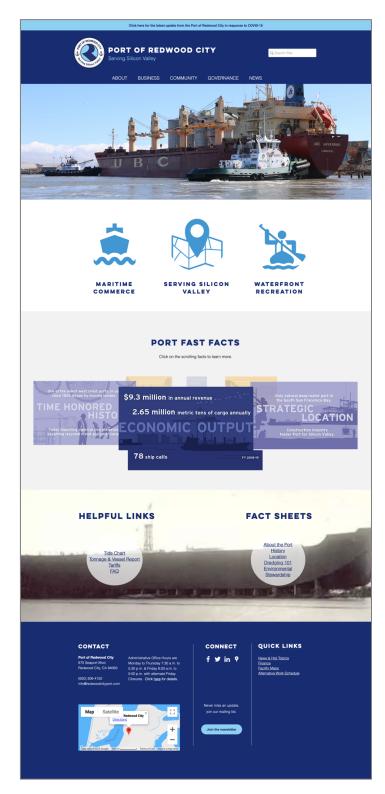
New Site Home Page

Redwoodcityport.com

New site makes use of hero image slideshow, consistent icons, fast facts slide show and helpful links and fact sheets to guide users to important information.

Additionally, the navigation has been simplified in the main menu, each with drop downs, and the footer has been standardized across each page with call-to-action options for linking to the map, subscribing to the newsletter and visiting social media platforms.

Old Site Home Page

The old site used an archaic layout that made it extremely difficult to navigate and find the information quickly. It also had no design or visual sensibility, which conveyed a message that the Port was still operating in a bygone era. It also lacked modern features like intuit organization, search functionality or bread-crumb navigation.
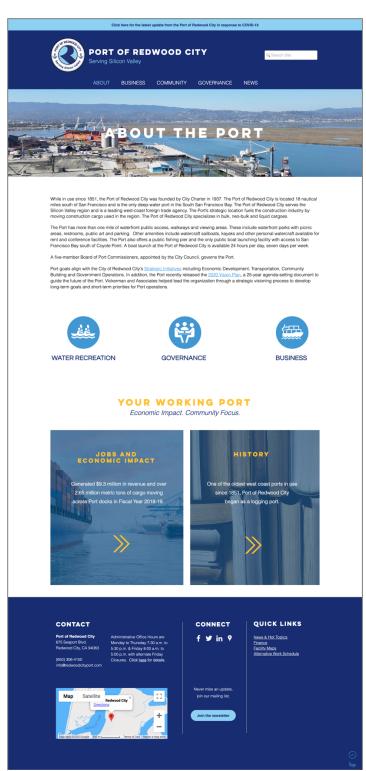
New About the Port Page

New site makes use of hero image and icons to help tell the Port story and encourage additional exploration.

Additionally, the call-out boxes highlight important key messages in the Port's narrative and encourage forward navigation.

An active search bar in the header along with intuitive navigation followers users throughout their experience on the site.

The copy used to describe the Port has been rewritten to convey important tenants of the Port's vision.

PORT OF REDWOOD CITY

Old Site About Page

PORT OF REDWOOD CITY

New Site Events Page

Redwoodcityport.com/events

New site makes use of multiple images, maps, campaign language, and call-to-action icons to encourage site users to visit the waterfront, host events on the waterfront, and learn about activities available.

PORT OF REDWOOD CITY

Old Site Events Page
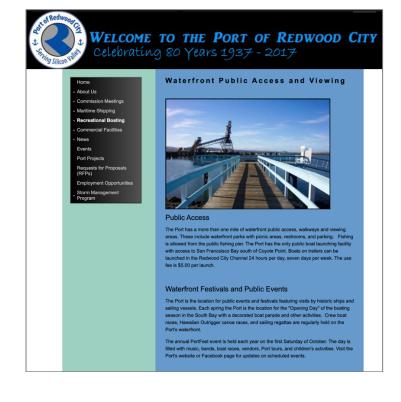
PORT OF REDWOOD CITY

New Site Community Page

Redwoodcityport.com/community

New site makes use of hero image, buttons, icons, and call-to-action box to help guide visitors to needed information.

Old Site Community Page

PORT OF REDWOOD CITY

New Site Sample Info Page

Redwoodcityport.com/dredging

New site makes use of imagery, icons, color, headlines, bullets and buttons to help present important information in easy to digest snippets.

Old Site Sample Info Page