# GEORGIA PORTS AUTHORITY: 2020 Virtual State of the Port: Charting the Course (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ufswRmCETow&t=1547s>\_) AAPA 2021 Entry Classification: Special Events

# 1. WHAT ARE THE ENTRY’S SPECIFIC COMMUNICATIONS CHALLENGES OR OPPORTUNITIES?

Because of COVID-19, the Georgia Ports Authority’s (GPA) 2020 State of the Port event could not be in person. Before the pandemic, more than 1,300 customers, elected officials and business leaders gathered each year for the sell-out event that often included Georgia’s governor. COVID-19 forced GPA to reimagine the event.

# 2. HOW DOES THE COMMUNICATION USED IN THIS ENTRY COMPLEMENT THE ORGANIZATION’S OVERALL MISSION?

The mission of the Georgia Ports Authority is to empower entrepreneurs, strengthen industries, sustain communities, and fortify families by relentlessly striving to accelerate global commerce. Georgia Ports virtual State of the Port is one of many tools geared toward both the community as well as customers, with an eye toward winning new business.

# 3. WHAT WERE THE COMMUNICATIONS PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING COMPONENTS FOR THIS ENTRY?

Goal: To share valuable information virtually about Georgia Ports with target audiences including port customers, elected officials, and members of the community.

Objective:

* To exceed the reach of 1,300 people from previous in-person events.
* To attract earned media through coverage of the virtual event.

# 4. WHAT ACTIONS WERE TAKEN AND WHAT COMMUNICATION OUTPUTS WERE USED IN THIS ENTRY?

* In May 2020, the team began brainstorming alternatives to the in-person September event.
* Staff considered possible formats and began to develop a style similar to both a news production, or the ESPN “Game Day” production where anchors at a desk tossed to different segments throughout the program. The segments allowed GPA to highlight partners to attract a broader audience.
* Each segment was scheduled, researched, and scripted before shooting. To film the main portion of the program, the team arrived on the dock at 2 a.m. to construct the set for the morning shoot. Scheduling was incredibly tight considering that the production could not interrupt the massive volume of cargo moving across the docks.
* GPA promoted the event through online ads and emails to more than 10,000 customers and partners. A promotional video was created that media partners used across all platforms.
* Georgia Ports also partnered with the groups featured in segments including customers, the International Longshoreman Association and economic developers to promote the event to their audiences.
* GPA boosted registration through social media promotions.

# 5. WHAT WERE THE COMMUNICATIONS OUTCOMES FROM THIS ENTRY AND WHAT EVALUATION METHODS WERE USED TO ASSESS THEM?

Dozens of customers, including such recognizable names as Starbucks and Kimberly-Clark emailed members of GPA’s sales team with positive feedback about the event. Here is a sample: “I wanted to give you props on a great State of the Port. You definitely made lemonade out of these lemons that 2020 has given us,” said Leo Hilzendeger of the Kimberly-Clark Corporation. “The content was great, and I truly enjoyed the format and all the topics you covered. And the activity in the background was awesome to see, the Maersk vessel being worked on and the CMA CGM Brazil berthing.”

GPA aimed to exceed the reach of its 1,300 in-person event through the virtual State of the Port. The total digital reach was 128,960. This included GPA Website hits (38,008), YouTube (29,500), social media impressions (56,134 impressions) and Google Analytics (5,318 views). Although 76% of viewers were in the U.S., viewers were also located in India, United Kingdom, Canada, Vietnam, Philippines, and a dozen others.