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2021 NCAGIO Annual Contest Entry, Campaign/Community Engagement

### **Project Description**

Raleigh-Durham International Airport (RDU) entered 2020 with projections to exceed 2019 passenger traffic and set another annual record for growth. From Jan. – March 2020, the airport was on track to welcome more than 15 million passengers compared to the 14.2 million it served during the prior year.

The COVID-19 pandemic hit RDU in April 2020. Passenger traffic plummeted by 97% in eight weeks, airport stores and restaurants were shuttered and confidence in air travel was severely undermined. RDU was experiencing an unprecedented event, and no one could predict how long the impact of COVID-19 would last or what its long-term effect on the airport might be.

Recognizing the need to reassure passengers that it was safe to fly, RDU's communications team developed the "Fly Confident. Fly RDU." campaign, which included two television commercials, a dedicated webpage on rdu.com, motion graphics, one-pagers, tool kits, digital signage and social media content.

"Fly Confident" prioritized health and safety messaging and reinforced RDU's commitment to protecting guests and airport employees, including the launch of enhanced cleaning and disinfecting practices, social distancing, a mask requirement and other best practices. Campaign tactics include press conferences, news releases, one-one-one media interviews, newsletters, web content and social media.

### **Goals**

RDU's "Fly Confident" campaign focused on three primary goals:

- **Creating Awareness:** Many changes designed to increase passenger health and safety were in place, but with reduced passenger traffic, RDU had to educate travelers, the media, employees, business partners and the community who weren't in the terminals to see the new measures.
- **Instilling Confidence:** RDU had a critical need restore confidence in air travel by acknowledging concerns about passenger health and safety during and after the pandemic and reassuring guests that it was still safe to fly.
- **Message Reach:** With RDU operating on a "survival budget" adopted in April 2020, limited financial resources were available for development and execution of the campaign. Success would be measured largely through earned media and a survey of RDU customers.

### **Production**

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The campaign was developed primarily using in-house resources, including RDU’s communications team and staff graphic designer, with assistance from our outside PR agency. A local production company RDU had previously worked with donated its services to produce and film a video, with RDU staff and other volunteers serving as talent. Execution of “Fly Confident” began in May 2020 and continued through Dec. 2020.

The campaign was driven by milestones rather a timeline because of the unprecedented nature of the pandemic and unpredictable recovery. Tying press conferences, news releases and story pitches to a milestone – such as the implementation of new health and safety practices – rather than a date gave RDU flexibility in a constantly evolving environment.

RDU amplified the campaign’s reach by repurposing content for our Insider newsletter (received by 90,958 airport customers), the Partners newsletter (received by 339 airport business partners, with additional “pass-through” readership via email forwards to on-site employees) and providing external organizations with a tool kit that included graphics, video assets and other creative content.

“Fly Confident” included a dedicated [webpage](#) created in-house that details the airport’s actions to protect health and safety, along with travel and airline information, guidance on public health best practices and a [video](#) that demonstrated a passenger’s journey through the new travel experience at RDU.

### **Evaluation**

RDU held a kickoff press conference, issued news releases, pitched stories to the media, distributed newsletters, and posted content to the airport’s website and social media channels. The campaign consistently generated earned media coverage from broadcast outlets including ABC 11, CBS 17, WRAL, FOX 50 and Spectrum, along with coverage in local and national publications including the Raleigh News & Observer, the Wall Street Journal and the Triangle Business Journal.

Media coverage spiked after key milestones in the campaign. The coverage was largely positive in tone and reflected the health and safety themes RDU intended to convey.

- **Creating Awareness:** A customer survey conducted by RDU in late summer 2020 showed strong awareness of the “Fly Confident” messaging, demonstrating that its themes were reaching key audiences. 90% of customers were aware of RDU’s health and safety measures, with 85% learning about them via email or newsletter and 49% hearing about them in the local media.
- **Instilling Confidence:** In the same survey, 83% of those who were aware of RDU’s efforts reported being confident that the airport was taking the necessary steps to keep passengers safe while traveling during the pandemic.
- **Message Reach:** RDU’s media monitoring service estimated the airport earned the equivalent of \$299,800 in earned media from May 21 through Aug. 31. Organizations that included “Fly Confident” content in their public outreach include Visit Raleigh (3,710

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subscribers), Discover Durham (9,000 subscribers), RALtoday (30,000 subscribers) and the North Carolina Chamber of Commerce (8,000 subscribers).

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