

# North Coast Harbor Branding & Marketing Cleveland, Ohio

Stakeholder Engagement

Brand Strategy

Communications Templates

Brand Guidelines

Website

Marketing Plan & Materials

Placemaking

North Coast Harbor is a district in downtown Cleveland that sits on Lake Erie and anchors world-class venues such as the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum, FirstEnergy Stadium – home of the Cleveland Browns – and the Great Lakes Science Center. Additionally, the district is energized with weekly events that draw in residents, out-of-towners and regular visitors to enjoy everything the lakefront has to offer.

### Objective

Activate the brand strategy and marketing efforts to unify lakefront stakeholders and elevate the area as a must-see destination.



***“A harbor destination is one step in the right direction to have a memorable, desirable lakefront.”***

Brendan Clark, Civic Commons Participant

## CASE STUDY

### North Coast Harbor Branding & Marketing

#### Our Core Belief

Because North Coast Harbor is Downtown Cleveland's connection to the Lake, we believe it is a place to be celebrated and enjoyed by all.

#### Why

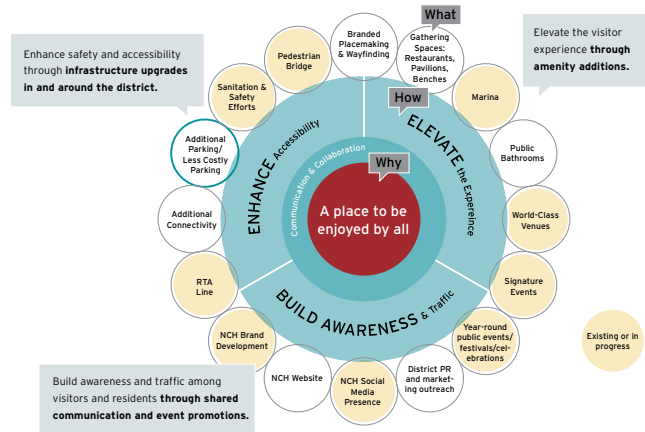
A place to be enjoyed by all

By starting with this premise, we connect people to this currently underused asset, and create an environment that people (residents and visitors) want to visit, stay the day, tell others about, and return to.

**Above:** Why – Your Purpose

**Above right:** How & What Diagram

**Right:** Positioning Statement



North Coast Harbor is the one Cleveland destination where the City meets the Lake, and Life intersects with unique venues, events and activities that enlighten, engage and entertain.

The Audiences: Cleveland-area residents, visitors, special organizations and groups

The Distinctive Advantage: the city's best lakefront views

The Guiding Principle: venues & activities in NCH are unlike others

The Products/Services

The End Benefit

## Challenge

While the Cleveland City Department of Port Control employs its Great Lake and river as an industrial shipping base, the downtown area where the land meets the water, also known as North Coast Harbor, was an underutilized recreational asset for a long time. Despite being home to world-class venues like the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, the Great Lakes Science Center and FirstEnergy Stadium, along with beautiful public spaces like Voinovich Park, the lakefront area sat lifeless on non-event days when visitors lacked a reason to be there.

"People would only visit one venue and leave," said Jessica Kerr, Project Manager for the Downtown Cleveland Alliance, a nonprofit organization that works with the City of Cleveland to steward North Coast Harbor. "It had accessible parking and top-notch venues, but everything was disjointed and lacked a sense of community."

As downtown Cleveland and its surrounding neighborhoods experienced a revival period over the last few years, North Coast Harbor needed its own purpose – one that would induce excitement and curiosity about the area. As a result, Cleveland City Department of Port Control and Downtown Cleveland Alliance engaged Guide Studio to develop and promote a brand that showcases North Coast Harbor's comprehensive value.

## Solutions

The Downtown Cleveland Alliance partnered with Guide Studio in 2013 to accomplish its first objective: Architect a new brand strategy that positions North Coast Harbor as a vibrant district in downtown Cleveland. And while that was the big to-do to check off the list, the relationship between the two organizations has continued to evolve as Guide Studio helps the lakefront district share its story and create branded experiences.

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#### PURPOSE ALIGNMENT

One of the “How’s” identified for North Coast Harbor was Elevate the Experience. This image board presents project types, design elements and ideas for public, passive recreational spaces that would support that purpose.



**Brand Strategy:** During the early stages of brand planning, it was evident that North Coast Harbor needed to rally all of its stakeholders (Rock Hall, Science Center, FirstEnergy Stadium, City of Cleveland etc.) together and gain support for creating a highly-connected and collaborative district experience. With the Downtown Cleveland Alliance, Guide Studio facilitated the Stakeholder Engagement process that put many of these organizations at the same table for the very first time, allowing them to develop a shared vision and purpose for this place.

Because this project was just as much about placemaking as it was about building a brand, Guide Studio also leveraged the vision to act more like a strategic plan for the North Coast Harbor District. This ensured that every idea, design and decision fundamentally aligned with why the district exists and what its visitors wanted. If it doesn't fit the purpose, it doesn't need to be done.

**Brand Identity (Design):** With the purpose and messaging for North Coast Harbor completed, the team was able visualize how the area could be transformed into a true urban asset that is embraced by residents and visitors at every turn. Guide Studio developed mood boards to present

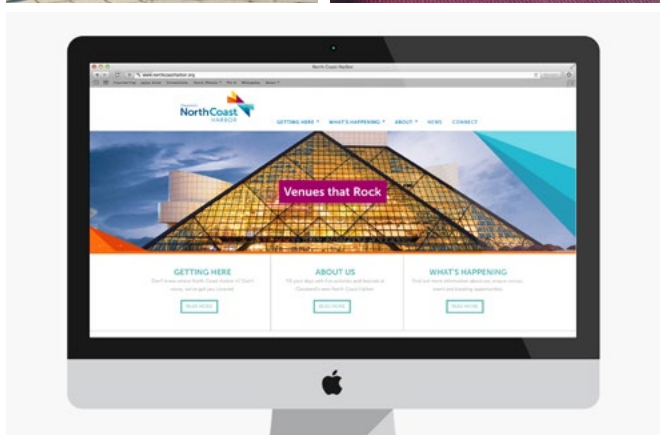
concepts showcasing how the district could utilize its green space, amenities and landscapes to activate brand-focused events and activities. Each of these concepts supported the district's new tagline, “City Meets the Lake,” and were presented alongside gateway and wayfinding signage that helps people navigate their way around.

**New Website:** Another big project initiative was the launch of the new North Coast Harbor website, which Guide Studio designed and continues to update and evolve. With the website, prospective visitors can virtually connect with the district to learn about all of the exciting news and events in one place, which is especially helpful for people on-the-go, rather than having to visit each venue's distinct website.

**Event Marketing & PR:** The first year of Guide Studio and Downtown Cleveland Alliance's partnership was focused on discovering and building the new brand, while consecutive years have been about utilizing the brand grow an audience. This objective has been accomplished through special events that tie back to the core of the brand — to provide an environment that can be enjoyed and celebrated by all.

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“With all of our brand elements in place, we needed to start promoting the district as a year-round gathering place, no matter what you’re looking for — exercise, fishing, music, etc.,” said Kerr. “We believe events are a great way to build momentum, and Guide Studio has been helping us engage an audience for them.”

As North Coast Harbor began to launch signature events like North Coast Namaste, a weekly yoga series during the summer at Voinovich Park, Pilates on the Pier and Fish CLE for Free, Guide Studio leveraged its marketing expertise to build awareness and draw in both locals and out-of-towners. The team deployed a variety of creative marketing tactics, including press releases and media outreach, brochures, hotel rack cards, taxi

toppers, signs, website and social media content, and more to promote the unique identity of each event within the context of the North Coast Harbor brand.

**Brand Champion Engagement:** Visitors are, of course, an extremely important audience for North Coast Harbor, but they aren’t the only one. All of district’s stakeholders — the institutions and people who reflect the brand and interact with visitors on a daily basis — needed to be supportive of the work being done in order for it to make a universal impact. In essence, if North Coast Harbor wins, everyone wins.

Guide Studio worked with Downtown Cleveland Alliance to engage various business owners and

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operators throughout North Coast Harbor in discussions about the district's brand and where it's headed, what their individual goals and challenges are, and what resources they have available to promote district-wide events as well as their own initiatives. After holding both individual and group brand engagement sessions with the key players, Guide Studio established a manifesto for the North Coast Harbor marketing steering committee, which meets regularly to align their work and share perspectives on how they can elevate the brand. Guide Studio is also working on a brand champion toolkit, including tools like the logo and tagline, maps, web and social media content, etc. to help everyone promote the district through their own channels.

#### PRESS LINKS

[Fox 8 Feature](#)

[Northeast Ohio Parent Magazine](#)

[The Plain Dealer](#)

[The Patch](#)

#### Results

While it has been nearly five years since North Coast Harbor launched its new brand, the spotlight on the lakefront has yet to fade. As Cleveland tourism, downtown living and business growth continue to boom, the district

has established a place on everyone's checklist. And by offering annual and weekly activities that match the personality of the brand, it's giving visitors a reason to come back again and again.

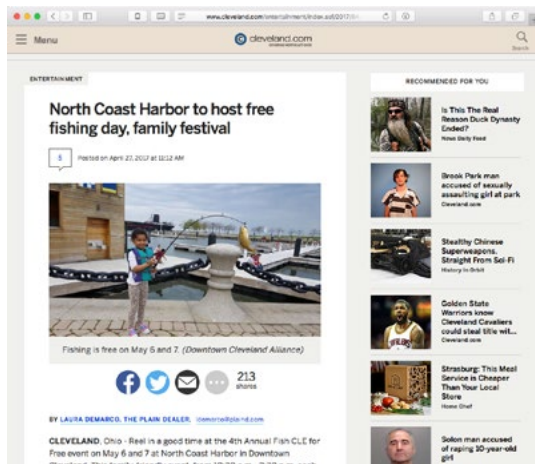
"We're attracting a solid base of regulars — people who live and work nearby — as well as visitors from across the region, country and globe," said Kerr. "If you walk through our parking lot, you'll notice the majority of license plates are from out of state."

The positive press hasn't hurt either. With Guide Studio's marketing and public relations support, the district's events have garnered a variety of earned media placements, including a TV interview, radio spot and articles in some of Cleveland's top publications.

"Instead of spending budget dollars on paid media, we're earning free placements in trusted media outlets, which is a huge testament to our brand and the work we're doing," said Kerr. "It has also helped us boost attendance for some of our events like Fish CLE for Free."

The multi-faceted approach North Coast Harbor has taken over the last few years — developing a new brand, launching a portfolio of events and coordinating efforts with all stakeholders — has helped the district make a name for itself among the top things to do and places to visit in a city overflowing with activity. The area that once sat vacant during the weekdays and the football team's offseason is now bustling with people because of its well-connected brand experience.

"Guide Studio consistently brings great ideas and creative solutions to table, and everything they do ties back to the core of our brand," said Kerr. "They've empowered us to become a top tourist and community destination, and we're looking forward to tackling the next phase of our evolution with them."



***"Prior to working with Guide Studio, all of these entities [FirstEnergy Stadium, the Rock Hall, Great Lakes Science Center, etc.] were operating in silos," said Kerr. "We had to bring everyone together to get aligned around the same mission — to promote North Coast Harbor as a must-see destination. If we get people here on a daily basis, we all benefit."***