

Old hand to head a new digital shop

On March 1, six months after Publicis acquired digital powerhouse Razorfish from Microsoft, Razorfish Health launched as a standalone shop. Katy Thorbahn, an 11-year Razorfish veteran who was tapped to lead the new company as SVP and GM, says the wheels were in motion to establish the new brand before Publicis entered the picture.

“Healthcare clients were asking questions that made it clear that the industry was ripe for innovation,” she explains. “They were hungry to think about the role digital plays and how to best leverage it. We decided it was a great time for us to focus more discretely on health and wellness.”

Navigating and integrating change is nothing new for Thorbahn, who joined what would become Razorfish in 1999 as client services director at iFrontier, which was acquired by aQuantive in 2002. A few years later, iFrontier merged with one of its fiercest competitors, aQuantive sister company Avenue A, and was rebranded as Avenue A/Razorfish. Then Microsoft bought aQuantive in 2007.

“Being part of Microsoft was a very heady experience,” she explains. “But we weren’t core to Microsoft’s overall business. We’re very core to Publicis’ business.”

She adds that the acquisition allowed Publicis to immediately hit its goal of generating a quarter of the holding company’s global revenue through digital channels. The move also meant that Razorfish would be stabled as a sibling with another former rival — Digitas.

“We’ve been fierce competitors for years,” Thorbahn says. “We have tremendous respect for one another.”

Though the two agencies will not commingle, Thorbahn reports to David Kramer, CEO of Digitas Health. Conflicts of interest do exist, and Thorbahn expects them

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Katy Thorbahn

*SVP, general manager,
Razorfish Health*

2006-2010

SVP, GM, Razorfish

1999-2005

VP, director client services
to director of operations,
iFRONTIER

1995-1999

VP, account supervisor, VirTu

to continue, though she notes that the presence of two strong digital healthcare agencies helps Publicis mitigate some conflicts.

“We can cover more of the landscape of available clients and manage competition better than if we just had a single agency,” she explains. “We’re looking at what each brand needs to be successful and making the right decisions for our own business. It isn’t about how I can unseat Digitas. I’m looking for opportunities where neither [of us] currently engages.”

Growing up in Media, PA (where she lives currently) Thorbahn was exposed to the ad world at a young age, as her father owned an outdoor advertising company and her uncle directed TV commercials. While still in high school, she set her sights on the business. As an intern, she discovered her love of client service, and she got her first taste of healthcare and digital at VirTu (now part of Dudnyk).

When not working, Thorbahn, a self-professed “ridiculous David Bowie freak” and homebody, spends as much time as possible with her husband and her children (11 and 13).

Mentoring is a priority at work because she believes it’s “imperative” to attract and nurture “passionate, smart, collaborative, innovative, entrepreneurial” talent. She’s very proud to have been chosen to develop and lead Razorfish Health.

“We’re entering the next stage of healthcare marketing,” Thorbahn says. “We have more astute marketers in

healthcare who are thinking about how they can offer tools and content and ways to facilitate their audiences making good decisions about health.

They want to build long-term relationships through service, not just products, and digital is an incredibly important backbone to that goal. We used to have to fight to demonstrate that clients should advertise on the internet. The question is no longer about advertising; it’s about facilitation of relationships. We’re great at that, and it’s what the industry needs.”

— Tanya Lewis



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